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By the Same Author:

TRAMPING THROUGH WALES

ENGLISH COMEDY: a novel DEAR LOVERS: a novel DIXON'S CUBS: a novel

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KING CARNIVAL: short stories

LUDLOW CASTLE



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Illustrated
with Photographs
by
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To JACK and DOROTHY HAINES

NOTE

Certain portions of this book are based upon wireless talks. I am grateful to the B.B.C. for permission to print them here.

J.C.M.

PREFACE

I HAVE lent the manuscript of this book to a friend, and he has returned it with the kindly comment: "Quite a nice book . . . but damn-all about the Welsh Marches." Looking through it now, I perceive that he is right. I find to my horror that I have written pages and pages about such diverse things as tramps, hikers, puritans, sociology, sheep dealers, rural preservation, public-house games, and drink. I am ashamed of myself; but nevertheless I do not think I could have written this book in any other way. After all, is not the whole of walking a digression, a wandering, a sort of gigantic pub-crawl? And how can I be relevant, how can I keep a straight course, how can I confine myself to the matter in hand, when I am writing about a pub-crawl?

At any rate, I hope no earnest pilgrim to the Welsh Marches will think that I have swindled him out of seven-and-sixpence... and yet perhaps I do not care very much if I have done so, because the earnest pilgrim is a dull dog, and I couldn't be bothered to write a book for his benefit, anyhow.

But let me set down here the notice which you see at very acute corners on a very winding road; for this book follows a twisting course and is full of sharp corners. Therefore, Reader, mark well this admonition: YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!

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CHAPTER ONE

THE FOREST

I

I HAVE often wondered why I undertake these disreputable wanderings, and lately I have decided that they are a sort of protest against my bourgeois and respectable nature. My inclinations lie in the direction of comfort, ease and quietude. My gods are lares and penates. I love familiar places, possessions, country delights, and little plots of land. I like to have my friends about me-solid, certain folk-to hear good talk, eat good food, drink good wine, and feel secure. I take a simple pleasure in those daily trifles which tie a man to his home. "The brook at the bottom of the garden has risen five inches in the night.—There's a crocus out on the front lawn.— The blackbird in the orchard has found a mate at last.-We must tie up a new coconut for the tits."

As for Adventure, I prefer to take it in an armchair. "God hateth him who roams!" echoes my spirit. My own hearth is Samarkand.

Thus gently persuades my Dr. Jekyll, who is three-quarters of me; but I am also one-quarter Mr. Hyde, and it is he who urges me to preposterous adventurings. Secretly I am certain that I am the sort of man who should live in a small villa in a suburb, go to the office every day by the 8.45, read the Morning Post in the train, grumble about the Bolsheviks, manage easily on a modest income, and play village cricket on Saturday afternoons. Alas, Mr. Hyde will have none of it. Whenever I show signs of settling down, of acquiring pleasant habits, of getting into a comfortable groove, Mr. Hyde whispers wickedly: "Now then, my lad, this will never do! You're becoming too sedate. You're frightened of Life. Aren't you?—Well, do something to disprove it!"

Consequently my existence is composed of a series of major and minor upheavals. Mr. Hyde prompted me to give up an easy job in a country town and adopt the uneasy profession of writing novels; sent me up to London with ten pounds in my pocket, to live in a condition which can only be described as dingy on the borders of Bloomsbury and Soho; caused me to suffer the long weariness of being Bohemian; and then (when I had with difficulty acquired the habit of going to dismal parties and drinking neat gin) packed me off to the mountains with a tent and a rucksack for my only company, in order that I might experience hardships and privations of a different kind.

Thereafter Dr. Jekyll triumphed for a peaceful year; and then suddenly Mr. Hyde compelled me to realise my only asset, an old motor car, and with the

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twenty pounds which I received for it to go scurrying off to Spain, where—for no reason at all that I can recollect—I bought a decrepit mule and rode the poor brute across the Sierra Nevada, sleeping each night at lousy *posadas* and subsisting on goat's milk, stewed donkey, and sour bread.

Mr. Hyde also induced me to spend some weeks bucketing about in a Cardiff collier and a Norwegian tramp-steamer, wherein for many days I was exceedingly seasick while the green rotten-smelling seawater swished to and fro across my cabin floor.

In fact, Mr. Hyde gives me no peace at all. He runs me into debt, causes me to fall preposterously in love, and permits me to settle nowhere for longer than six months or a year. And his is the responsibility for this book, since he decided last March that I was becoming too staid and too contented, and so on a bright showery morning set my rucksack on my back again, and my feet towards the Marches of Wales.

At the beginning of a walking-tour my spirits are invariably low. I look back regretfully upon the pleasant things I am leaving behind me: my little library; my new novel, three-quarters done, which greeted me on my desk every morning; the brook in which I would fish for trout on sunny afternoons; the small friendly inn where at evening I met the countrymen who are my friends. . . . Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit! How vividly I remember them now!

I look forward to a vista of uncomfortable weeks: encounters with strangers who will doubtless regard

me as more than a little mad; the peculiar form of loneliness which seems to be connected with the fact that the postman will not rap upon my door at eight o'clock every morning; the miseries of putting up at wayside inns; the probability of unkind weather. I can see no reason why I should ever have set forth. Adventure, I tell myself, is a mirage chased by fools. There is no shrine in the world that is worth the long weariness of pilgrimage. Hassan and Ishak were lunatics to leave Baghdad. Marco Polo was probably homesick and unhappy at the court of the Great Khan. Sir John Mandeville and Baron Munchausen were merely liars, and may have been sensible men who spent their whole lives by their own firesides. . . .

These thoughts occupied my mind as I walked westwards out of Gloucester on this March morning. I knew the profound loneliness which is so perfectly expressed in that almost cosmic poem, that early and anonymous cri de cœur, which stands at the beginning of the Week-end Book-

"Christ, that my love were in my arms, And I in my bed again!"

In vain I told myself that I had always felt like this at the moment of setting out on my wanderings; that later I should grow cheerful, and stride along merrily, and search for Adventure with a high heart. It was no good; my feet dragged, and my rucksack was heavy on my shoulders. At last, after many weary miles, I came to a place called Dursley Cross, where there was a small inn, and thinking that a stirrup-cup might

THE FOREST

cheer me, I entered the inn and ordered a pint of beer.

The landlady was buxom, jolly, and ribston-pippincheeked. "Walking, sir?" she asked, eyeing my rucksack as she drew the beer. "It's early in the year for walkers, yet." I noticed that she did not accuse me of being a hiker, and I blessed her in my heart. "And where might you be going, sir, if I might take the liberty?" she said.

"Well, I'm beginning with the Forest of Dean."

"That's a bad place," she murmured, shaking her head; and two ingenuous young men who were playing shove-ha'penny in the corner looked up and shook their heads also, supporting her. "A bad place, sir, with bad people. They're rough and wild and uncivilised. I wouldn't recommend the gentleman to go walking in the Forest, would you, Bob?"

The young men agreed.

"There are nicer places, that's certain."

I was growing interested. My loneliness and depression were gradually vanishing; though whether as a result of the beer or of the conversation I cannot certainly say. I even began to feel faintly excited.

"Surely," I said, "you're just on the edge of the Forest here?"

"Yes," replied the jolly old woman, "but I wouldn't live in the Forest, not if you gave me a house rent-free. Of course," she added charitably, "they're not so bad as they were. Twenty years ago now, you should have known 'em then. The War civilised 'em."

It was a queer thought that War should civilise anybody. But the woman went on:

"Took 'em out of 'emselves, it did. And then came the buses, and they civilised 'em a bit more. Why, sir, you wouldn't believe it, but twenty years ago a lad from one Forest village couldn't go courting a girl in another village five miles away—he'd be stoned all the way back home, for his impudence."

I smiled, thinking how easy a thing we had made Love to-day, and wondering whether it would not be better for us if we erected a few new obstacles to cross, or resurrected some old ones. What man in love has not wished that he might have a chance of slaying a dragon for his lady's sake? What lover worthy of the name would not delight in the prospect of a stoning, that he might prove to his mistress what he would suffer for her? So I said to the landlady: "That sounds like a good custom. It must have been exciting to visit your girl through a hail of brick-ends!"

The young man called Bob stolidly disagreed.

"I'd rather do my courting quiet-like, in a dark lane!"

"Then you've never been in love!" I told him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe. I've never been a fool over a girl, if that's what you mean!"

Wise, countrified Bob! How placid life must be if you never make a fool of yourself over a woman! He went back to his shove-ha'penny, rubbing the board with his sleeve.

"Girls are all right, eh, Bob?" said his opponent tolerantly.

"Aye. In their place."

"You've got one empty bed, and I've got two."

THE FOREST

I grinned, but they were talking about shoveha'penny, not about girls. The landlady, harking back to the stonings, told me with satisfaction:

"That's why the Foresters are so intermarried. Lot of lunacy there is in the Forest. But, as I say, they're not as bad as they used to be. They used to be always fighting and doing dreadful things which got them into the papers and the police-courts. They're quieter now. All the same, I shouldn't mention 'bears' if you go to Ruardean. Not unless you want trouble."

Bob, who had won his game by skilfully sliding three successive halfpennies into the empty 'bed' at the top of the board, stood up and chuckled. "Ah, that's right. Don't mention bears at Ruardean. The folk don't like it."

"What is the bear story?" I begged. This was not the first time I had received the strange warning: "Don't mention 'bears' at Ruardean." Two days ago, seeking information about the Forest, I had called upon my friend John Haines, who disguises himself as a successful country solicitor, although he is, as it were clandestinely, one of the best literary critics in England, a poet and the confessor of poets, a botanist of note, and several other distinguished things. He is also the Steward to the Court of Verderers of the Forest of Dean, an institution which has functioned for more than nine hundred years and which still administers the Forest laws, although (as John Haines rather regretfully told me) it no longer chops off the right hands of poachers, nor strings up sheep-stealers on the tall oak trees.

I remembered now that John Haines, talking very fast and very enthusiastically about the Forest which he knew so well, had mentioned this matter of bears and Ruardean, had warned me not to look for trouble, and then had passed on to something else. I had meant to ask him for the story, but had forgotten to do so. Now I was curious. "Tell me about it," I said to the young man called Bob.

He smiled.

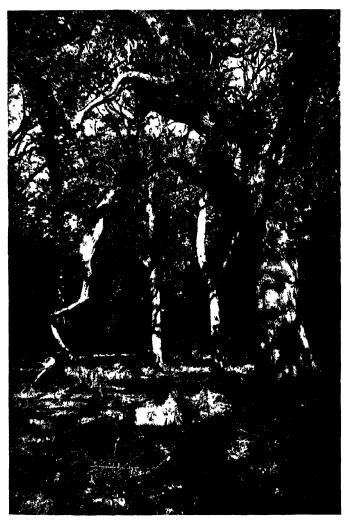
"Ask them at Ruardean and see what happens!"

"Don't you do it, sir. He's pulling your leg." The landlady shook her finger at the young man. "For shame, Bob!"

"The gentleman wants adventure. He said he'd like to go and court his lass through a hail of bricks. Let him ask about the bears at Ruardean. Maybe he'll have some fun." Bob shuffled out, hands in pockets. The old woman looked doubtful. As for me, I was puzzled and amused. I was going to enjoy this walking-tour after all. Perhaps Hassan and Ishak hadn't been such fools. . . . I slung my rucksack on my back, and I swear it felt lighter; it was no longer a burden, it was merely something which braced back my shoulders and reminded me that I mustn't slouch. I bade the landlady good-day and went out into the sunshine. Bob and his friend were already outside. "I'll go to Ruardean!" I shouted back to them, as I cheerfully set forth. They laughed.

"'Tis said that a bit of raw beefsteak's the best thing for the eye," called Bob obscurely.

I went down to the cross-roads and set my face towards the west.



Oaks in the Forest

[Facing page 8]

THE FOREST The sun was setting when I reached the top of the

lane which winds over a little hill to the village of Longhope. The Forest was spread out before me, with the sky aflame behind it, and because of the great blaze of the sunset the mass of bare trees looked very dark. The oaks were sepia and the patches of conifers were black. There seemed to be three folds, as it were, in the landscape: three ranges of small, steep hills, thickly covered with trees. The Forest looked deep and formidable; a place of shadows, and little sky. In the valley immediately below me lay the cluster of houses which was Longhope. Farther up the valley was Mitcheldean, and beyond, over Plump Hill, my map showed the town of Cinderford. This seemed a convenient objective, and so I went down into Longhope, walked along the tarmac to Mitcheldean, and turned to the left up the Roman road which straightly climbs Plump Hill and straightly goes down into the valley on the other side. How direct and purposeful are these Roman roads; there's no nonsense about them, they have none of the pusillanimity of modern motor-ways, which hug the valleys and wind round the hills along the contours, seeking like rivers the line of least resistance. The old Roman tracks are braver, and devoid of subtleties; for, mark you, it is not by subtleties that Empires are made. These Roman roads are determined, careless of obstacles, brutal, superb. You can read in them the minds of generals who believed simply that the quickest way from one point to another was a straight line joining the two. If they thought of hills at all, they probably said: "It'll be good training for the

legionaries, marching up them." That was the way Rome conquered England, and that is why she left no trace of her conquest but the cold stone of her cities and the hard, straight roads pounded by her legionaries' feet. Conquest is a matter of directness; Culture, more subtly inflicted, comes creeping round corners. The Normans had quick, complex French minds and subtle French manners. They built bad roads, cowardly roads, which went round about the hills; and yet they brought us a language and a living tradition, whereas Rome came, saw, conquered, and departed without changing our secret English folk one whit. It left its mark on the face of the earth, but it left no mark on our minds.

Nevertheless, there is something very splendid about a Roman road. It is so single-minded; it is never confused, it is never in doubt, and it has but one unwavering purpose—to reach its goal—which it swiftly and unfalteringly achieves. The men who planned it sacrificed to Jupiter, without troubling their heads to define him-no tangled trinities for them!-without even caring very much whether he existed or whether he was a myth. Likewise, they killed a cock now and then to the other gods; it was well to be on the safe side. For the rest, they kept fit, trained themselves as soldiers, fought battles, planted the Eagle Standard in new provinces, made wise laws, and collected Cæsar's tribute every year. Incidentally, they loved, diced, ate, and drank without any puritan soul-searchings. They were bothered with no Duty towards God apart from the obligation of sacrifice, and their Duty towards their

THE FOREST

Neighbour was simply their Duty towards Rome. And they died untroubled by hope of heaven or fear of hell.

Their world contained no St. Thomas Aquinas, no Luther, no Calvin . . . and there were still fifty years to run before the strange wild dream came out of Galilee. So the Romans made straight roads, and preferred to cut straight across a hill's shoulder than to go round it.

At Horsepool Bottom I left the Roman road and went through the dark woods to Cinderford. Four nice children from a cottage at the Forest's edge greeted me with timid 'Hellos'. They were fair, fresh-cheeked, good-looking, unnaturally clean. I paused as I climbed over the stile, remembering some chocolate in the pocket of my rucksack. "I say, d'you like sweets?" No answer. I found the slab of chocolate and broke it up into pieces. "Catch!" They caught, efficiently and without fuss, close to the body, like cricketers. "You field in the slips," I said to the eldest boy. He grinned. The children looked from one to another, became suddenly embarrassed, clutched their bits of chocolate tightly and possessively, and began to run away. When they had run about twenty yards they paused and said "Thank you." Then they went home, munching. Very English! I thought of the brown, merry imps of the South, Latin, Arab and Moor, whose crinkly, sun-made smiles are so sweet that they melt your heart and wheedle pennies out of your pocket, who are so wickedly wise that they assail you with compliments

when you are walking with a lady—muy guapa! muy hermosa!—and who, at the age of nine, terrify elderly and respectable travellers by asking: "Likee see my sistair? Very dam' pretty! Very dam' clevair! Very dam' good!" It is strange that fifteen degrees of latitude should make such a difference....

The path through the woods was steep and slippery, and blocked every hundred yards or so by spruces which had been blown down in the blizzard at the end of the previous week. It was dusk when I came down into Cinderford, which is a drab, dreadful town built on the old principle that nothing connected with coal-mining must be other than ugly. It is very compact, and does not straggle like most country towns: it gathers its skirt close around it. And that, I think, is because the Forest stands so watchfully about it, because the trees seem so ready to creep inwards when the night falls. The houses huddle together like sheep when a fox is near them: heads outwards, tails together, afraid. Cinderford can never forget that it is a Forest town, and that the trees' shadows grow longer in the evening. . . .

I spent the night at Cinderford, which possesses several small public-houses but not a single first-class hotel. I was bored and rather lonely, so I went to the cinema and watched a cowboy film, which is the only sort of picture I really enjoy. Then I sat in the Bar at my inn for half an hour before I went to bed, and talked with an Old Gaffer who was in the fine toothless tradition of Old Gaffers—he had a beard which wagged when he spoke, he frequently poked me in the ribs with a long, crooked finger, he chuckled in the

THE FOREST

proper cracked and creaking way, and he sipped cider from a china mug. Moreover, he mumbled, so that I could not possibly understand what he was talking about, except that it had something to do with pigs, that he had once signed his name to a document and thereby sold his birthright, and that he possessed a Prodigal Son.

H

The Forest of Dean is such a queer place, and is so little known, that it is necessary to give an account of it before I continue the story of my wanderings.

It is roughly a triangle, 23,000 acres in extent, with its apex at the junction of the River Severn and the River Wye. On the west side of it are the old border towns of Chepstow and Monmouth; on the east, Newnham and Lydney; at the top, Ross-on-Wye; and in the middle of it are its own Forest towns of Cinderford and Coleford.

The Brecon Beacons, which you may see from its hilltops on a clear day, are a long trek to the westward, and you must go twenty-five miles before you traverse the March into Wales. So map and Statute Book declare; but Wales is really nearer than that, and in spirit anyhow you are at the Marches when you cross the River Wye. Monmouth may be a County of England, but its character is Welsh. Offa's great dyke, that ran from the Dee to the Severn at Beachley, had Monmouth behind it. Monmouth was Wales then. And still you find, at Newport, at Pontypool, at Tredegar, in the hills that look northward to Here-

ford, the little dark men who speak so quickly and so musically, and who love to sing the sad songs of Wales.

Here and there you see them even in the Forest. It was once decreed that any Welshman found on the eastern side of Offa's dyke should return whence he came—without his right hand. In more tolerant times, some of the Monmouth people have migrated to the Forest coal-mines, and their speech mixes with the slow talk of Gloucestershire.

The Forest of Dean belongs to the Crown. It used to be a royal hunting ground, wherein William the Conqueror, the three first Henrys, and that bad fellow King John chased the wild red deer. But the possession of deer is always somewhat embarrassing, and the stags and hinds of the Forest, straying from their home, made frequent and expensive raids on the crops and gardens adjoining it. In compensation for this damage the Crown granted certain grazing rights to the land-owners, and thus the 'Foresters' began.

Now the laws of the Forest of Dean are very curious and complicated, and it would require a book bigger than this one to expound them. Even then it could not be done with certainty, because nobody is quite sure what the interpretation of these ancient laws should be. They are concerned with the rights of mining and grazing which the Foresters hold from the Crown. The mining rights are fairly clearly set forth. The 'free miner' must be born of a free father and he must work for a year and a day in a mine; he may then apply for the grant of a 'gale'

SQUATTERS IN THE FOREST

[Facing page 14]

which he is entitled to work on his own. When you are walking through the Forest you frequently come across the small square holes, half-covered with vegetation, where the 'free miners' have been getting their surface-coal.

The grazing rights of the Foresters are much more confused. The two chief difficulties are, first, to define the word 'Forester' and secondly, to determine what beasts he is legally permitted to graze. 'Squatters' have possessed themselves of clearings in the Forest, where they have built shacks which have grown into solid cottages. The present occupiers of these little holdings, whether they are legally Foresters or not, almost all own a few sheep, which graze on the herbage beneath the oaks. The great problem is this: Is the sheep a commonable animal? The Crown says no, the owners of the sheep say yes. The matter has been in doubt for hundreds of years and will probably remain so for another hundred, unless in the meanwhile some litigious idiot spends a fortune in taking it to the House of Lords. It is debated at the Forest inns almost nightly, in the same grave and abstruse manner as religious questions are debated. The argument goes on and on; it is like the slow, fervent bickering of Scottish Presbyterians about a difficult passage in the Scriptures. "Is the sheep a commonable animal?" It sounds like some unanswerable academic poser: An chimæra, bombinens in vacuo....

And meanwhile the Foresters, who are not without humour, graze as many sheep as they like and even grumble when the Crown plants conifers, beneath which no herbage will grow. Everywhere in the

11,000 acres which the Crown may not enclose the scraggy sheep move restlessly to and fro, gleaning their meagre living. In the spring, the thin-necked, big-bellied ewes waddle down the main roads, slow and heavy with lamb, causing motor cars to brake sharply at every corner. Later they come boldly into the towns and villages, with their baa-ing lambs behind them, and search the dustbins and rubbishheaps for cabbage-stalks. . . .

Thus the men of the Forest are jacks-of-all-trades. They are miners, woodmen, and farmers; and down at Newnham, when the salmon run up Severn, they are fishermen as well, having humorously possessed themselves of the semblance of a right to net the river.

Moreover, they are extremely jealous of these privileges which they have acquired by long custom and long obstinacy. A few years ago the Crown attempted to enclose a piece of land which had not been enclosed before. The Foresters were delighted; for the new fence stoked their cottage fires on the day when it was completed.

III

On the second day of my walking-tour, I did my walking underground. The Secretary of the local Colliery Owners' Association had kindly obtained for me permission to go over a mine; and so at ten o'clock I was delivered into the charge of a small, rather bird-like, delightful person to whom coal was poetry. Like a man reciting a sonnet he explained,

in his office close to the pit-head, the maps and plans of the mine. Then he lit a lantern and off we went. I left my stomach at the top of the shaft and found it again at the bottom; meanwhile, my guide was telling me that we had descended nine hundred feet into the bowels of the earth. "Barometric pressure increases so-much . . . temperature at the face, so-much . . . You'll get used to the darkness soon. This is our way. Take care not to trip over things."

We walked a great distance down winding 'roads' along which, now and then, the trolleys terrifyingly rattled. At our feet an endless chain jerked forward, paused, screeched on. Will-o'-the-wisps glowed at the road's end, and came swaying towards us: lamps fixed on men's foreheads, each like the blazing eye of a Polyphemus. We passed through wooden doors fixed in the roads; draughts silently closed them after us, as if they were obedient ghosts which leapt out of the darkness behind us. Here was cold air, rushing down a shaft; here was hot air, full of carbon dioxide, hurrying back after a hundred men and twenty horses had breathed it.

We turned a corner and encountered a familiar, ammoniac smell. 'Stables!' They were whitewashed, well-lit, and spotlessly clean. A row of loose-boxes and a row of stalls. There mixed with the ammoniac tang the clean smell of oats and sweet hay. Four or five glossy draught horses looked round at us, scraped their hoofs on the floor, arched their necks.

"Fat as butter!" I thought. I ran my hand along the back of a tall chestnut. He was fit as well as fat;

17 3

he was one of the sleekest, loosest-skinned, best-kept horses I had ever seen.

Now in the course of a mis-spent youth I have acquired little learning, and I am afraid that a great proportion of that which I have acquired has to do with horses. Hours which should have been spent in reading have been occupied in riding instead. For three successive winters I got up by candlelight in order to groom and feed my bay mare Cinders, my jet-black, white-blazed Judy, and my tall, saturnine chestnut Brampton, the pensioned-off steeplechaser who ran away with me whenever he saw the hounds. Therefore I think that I am competent to judge whether a horse is fit and whether a horse is contented. These pit-horses were fit and contented. I remembered Ralph Hodgson's poem:

"Wretched blind pit-ponies, And little hunted hares . . ."

I moved my hand quickly across the chestnut's line of vision; it started, threw up its head, blinked. What a dangerous thing, I thought, is sentimentality—particularly the artful sentimentality of good poets! That verse of Hodgson's had doubtless caused much misery and pain to many sensitive people, and had prompted numbers of stupid and well-meaning old ladies to subscribe money they could ill-afford towards Societies for the Protection of Pit-ponies and to write letters to the papers about a question of which they were completely ignorant.

And now, as we left the stables and crawled on our

hands and knees towards the coal-face, where two sweating miners were at work, I thought how much more useful it would have been if those well-meaning old ladies had spent their money and propaganda for the benefit of the *men* who work in the dark places, getting the coal which makes such nice comforting fires in the old ladies' drawing-rooms . . . and trying, perhaps, to keep a wife and family on seven and ninepence a day. . . .

My guide led me back towards the shaft. He was still reciting his poem, but I understood now that it was not a sonnet, it was an epic, a dark Odyssey, a subterranean Iliad. We passed a corner where there was a stretcher and a first-aid box. 'Ambulance Station.' I thought of men with crushed arms and legs, lying in the darkness. Roof-falls are still common. I remembered that a hundred years ago there were still children in the mines, and the semblance of women who pulled the trucks.

"... If Parson lost his senses
And people came to theirs,
And he and they together
Knelt down with angry prayers
For wretched, blind pit-ponies
And little hunted hares..."

A dangerous thing, I thought—sentimentality.

IV

At mid-day we came up into the sunlight again. I bade farewell to my guide and went back to Cinderford through Soudley, a pleasant little village which lies in a hollow. In the afternoon I walked out to the Speech House, which is situated in the centre of the It was once the Court where the Forest disputes were settled, but it is now an excellent and comfortable hotel. It stands at the junction of the Cinderford, Coleford, and Lydney roads. These roads, though they are tarmac'd, are like rides through the Forest. The great oaks overhang them, and on right and left of them the woods grow deep, the brown trunks of the trees rise straightly, and the dark hollies grow. In May the bluebells in the clearings surge up through the soil like hidden springs that gush forth unexpectedly; later the foxgloves bloom for the fairies. On this March day there was only the brown bracken under the trees, with the sad-looking sheep of the Forest wading through it, searching for pastures.

It was an afternoon of warm sun and wind, and sudden hail-showers; but at dusk it became calm, and a big moon swam into the sky and became caught in the branches of the oak-trees, like a monstrous luminous deep-sea fish netted by a trawl. It was an evening for walking, and so at seven o'clock, having left my kit at the Speech House, I set off through the moonlit woods towards Ruardean.

Now I had already discovered, by tactful questioning of my landlord at Cinderford, the whole truth about

the Ruardean bear. About forty years ago, it seemed, a Frenchman had come to Ruardean with a performing bear. The people of Ruardean had got it into their thick heads that this bear had killed a little girl. Of course it had done nothing of the sort; but suddenly they went a little mad, as crowds so often do, and they stoned the Frenchman and his bear on Ruardean Hill. The Frenchman escaped, but the bear was surrounded and slowly stoned to death, even as Stephen was stoned to death outside Jerusalem. I believe the people of Ruardean finished it off, rather horribly, with knives.

That was the story of the Ruardean bear; and since the episode had happened forty years ago, in the Forest's bad, uncivilised days, one might expect that it would have been forgotten. But no, my landlord told me; Ruardean was ashamed of it still—so ashamed of it that the mention of 'bears' in Ruardean was an invitation to a fight. "Why," finished the landlord, "it isn't more than two years back that they upturned a gipsy caravan in the street here, because the gipsies leaned out and laughed and howled: 'Who killed the bear? Who killed the bear? as they came into the town!"

I decided that I would go to Ruardean and see these savages for myself; but I assure you that when I set out, on that peaceful, moonlit evening, my intentions were completely innocent, and I certainly did not propose to say anything about bears.

My undoing was the little inn at Nailbridge Cross Roads, which I reached at about eight. Here I met a number of miners, with whom I drank more pints

of beer than I can drink without losing my discretion. The result was that when we were finally turned out of the Nailbridge Inn I found myself in the rather tipsy company of several men of Ruardean, and I insisted on walking back home with them. At Ruardean we chanced to meet some more men who had just returned from refreshing themselves at Lydbrook; and aided and abetted by the beer inside me I chose this unfortunate moment to address the whole company and to ask innocently: "By the way, can anyone tell me who killed the bear?"

I was prompted less by mischief than by what seemed, at the time, to be a spirit of scientific inquiry. I would find out for myself whether the reactions of Ruardean to the word 'bear' were as strangely violent as I had been led to suppose. I felt the aloof and academic interest of a professor who mixes two acids in a retort and wonders whether the compound will explode.

It did explode.

There was a short silence after I had put my question; and then there arose a sort of murmur, deep-throated and menacing—the same angry murmur which I had heard once before at Seville, when a crowd surged slowly forward on to the bayonets of the Civil Guard.

Slightly tipsy though I was, I recognised the sound, and knew its meaning. I looked over my shoulder, and thanked heaven that my line of retreat was clear. I took one more glance at my front, and saw a tall man with a red face and a long nose coming very purposefully towards me, followed by seven or eight

smaller men whose demeanour was equally unpleasing. I remembered the wise words of Malcolm:

"Let us not be dainty of leave-taking But speed away."

I turned and ran. A clatter of heavy feet followed me down the road, but it soon ceased, for the men of Ruardean were too drunk to pursue me very far. Nevertheless, I did not stop running for a quarter of an hour; and when I had reached the top of a very steep hill I took to the woods, feeling exactly like an outlaw. Then I walked slowly and thoughtfully back to Speech House. I was rather pleased with the success of my experiment, but I wistfully remembered the tall fellow's very prominent nose, and I half-wished I had stayed for a fight. However, I should have been sore by now if I had done so; and perhaps the wild men of Ruardean would have treated me as they treated the Frenchman and his bear.

The woods were very still, and the only sound I heard on the way home was the sudden, unearthly scream of a vixen to whom, within fifty yards of me, a dog-fox was making love. It is a noise such as a frightened child might make; it simply shrieks 'murder' at you, and even if you are a countryman you never get used to it, you never hear it without feeling a little shiver down your spine. Thrice the vixen squealed, then there was a low purring growl, and silence surged back to the woods. The moon had swung clear of the nets made by the oak-trees' branches, and was free of the whole deep ocean in

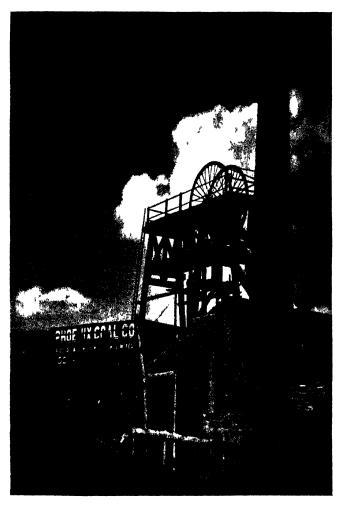
which the stars were riding-lights. I could read my map and see my path as clearly as if it were day.

v

The Speech House was such a pleasant place that I decided to spend two nights there. Accordingly, on the morning after my scientific experiment at Ruardean, I set off unladen for a long tramp through the Forest which would bring me back to the Speech House at evening.

The Forest is unique chiefly because of its queer contrasts. Walking from Speech House towards Park End, my way took me at first down lovely rides between the oaks. Then I came round a corner and suddenly, astonishingly, the New Fancy colliery stood before me, with its tall chimney and its gigantic tip. I do not know any other district in which one may find modern industry and unspoilt woodland in such close juxtaposition; and yet somehow, in the Forest, industry is not the same dark horror as it is in the North. There is a terrible desolation about the slagheaps of Lancashire and Yorkshire, an air of ruin and decay. In the Forest of Dean the great trees are always in sight, and the bracken climbs the old tips of the collieries foot by foot as the years go by.

I had been told that from the top of New Fancy I should have the best view in the Forest, so I walked up the steep tip and smoked a pipe on its summit. The day was blue and sunny, with a slight haze which hid the Severn estuary and the far Welsh hills. Nevertheless, I could see clearly for four or five miles. Here



A FOREST PITHEAD

[Facing page 24]

at New Fancy I was right in the middle of the Forest, and the whole of it was spread out below me—little hills and dark masses of trees, with here and there the light-green of a nursery of young conifers and here and there a woolly puff of smoke from a colliery chimney. I had a queer perception of vast, hidden activities going on invisibly among those trees. Here, there, everywhere, a thousand feet beneath the soil, men were working at the coal-face, trolleys were rattling along the underground roads, engines were pumping water at hundreds of gallons a minute—and all I could see of it, the only outward and visible sign of this subterranean life—was a ball of white smoke like cottonwool, floating above the trees.

Industry makes little impression on the Forest, which is not much less wild and lonely to-day than it was when the Romans mined in it for iron-ore. The tall chimneys cannot change it, they have somehow become part of it. One feels that the Forest does not mind them being there, since it knows very well that when mankind needs coal no more, or when mankind has ceased to be, then will be time enough to send those tall chimneys toppling and to cover the great New Fancy tip with mosses and ferns. And then—queer thought!—perhaps the old trees of the Forest, falling and rotting, will be making more Coal Measures for another Coal Age a million years hence!

My walk took me to Whitemead Park, where the Crown's offices are, and then back in a semicircle through the deep woodland to Coleford. I found a narrow, forgotten path that led me through the thickest parts of the Forest; I swear it had not known

a footprint for years. As I trudged along, ducking under the low boughs of the oaks and pushing my way between the branches of the saplings, it struck me that the reason why I found the Forest so satisfying was simply this: that it really was a Forest. So few forests are. I used to read fairy-stories about them when I was a little boy, and I imagined them as very dark and very terrible and very exciting places, where you met with strange adventures and with strange beasts, where you lost yourself at night-time, and where the bad goblins led you astray and the good fairies put you on your path again. Almost all the fairy-tales had a forest for their scene. Red Riding Hood's grandmother lived in the forest. ("What great big teeth you've got!"-Wasn't that a queer, creepy, frightening story, and didn't you jump out of your skin when you came to the awful reply: "All the better to eat you with, my dear!") Anyhow, that was the sort of jolly thing that happened in the Forest: your grandmother turned out to be a wolf. And you found giants there, and elves there, and witches there, and all these creatures lived among the dark trees.

Now when I first saw the Radnor Forest, and a deer forest in Scotland, I experienced that dreadful disappointment and disillusionment which small boys feel so sharply when they discover for the first time that something is not as exciting as they had imagined it would be. These forests were neither dark nor frightening; they were just bare and lonely, and they were completely devoid of trees!

Discovering the Forest of Dean to-day, I felt as if I were walking back into the fairy-tales. The place

was really deep and dark and exciting. Surely I might at any moment come upon the cottage of Red Riding Hood's grandmother in a clearing!

As for elves and gnomes and such-like, there is documentary evidence of them—if I may speak of a London news-sheet as a 'document' and of its reports as 'evidence'. The affair occurred a few years ago, but the mere mention of it—like that of hears at Ruardean-still causes embarrassment to the Foresters, who are beginning to have a faint suspicion that over this matter they were made laughing-stocks. A London journalist with a very long nose poked it into the Forest and sniffed out, like a witch-pricker, a few old people who still believed in fairies. Sensation! This London journalist, yelping, as it were, on a hot scent, eventually ran down a miner who declared that he had seen a little green man at the bottom of a mine. Sensation! The journalist (how thorough in truth-seeking is the Press!) looked for 'corroboration' and found a goodwife who was prepared to say that she too had seen a little green man—he had jumped out of the coal-scuttle one day when she was putting some coals on the fire. Yes, he was about so-high; one of the green pixie-folk who lived in the mines. Sensation! The journalist sharpened his pencil and got to work. Next day half England knew that two gnomes had been seen in the Forest of Dean; or rather, since the report was faintly cynical, it knew that the primitive and highly superstitious inhabitants of the Forest of Dean believed that they had seen them. Then the fun began. The loathéd tribe of folk-lorists (who persist in regarding

country people as slightly half-witted but nevertheless amusing children) hastened into print with articles on such subjects as "The Origin of the Idea of Fairies" and "The Survival of Ancient Superstitions". Grave old gentlemen reminded the world that similar fancies to those held in the Forest of Dean existed among the ignorant cobalt miners in certain parts of Germany, who believed in little blue pixies called 'kobbolds'—hence the word 'cobalt'. Humourists suggested that the Foresters should take more water with it; pink rats, they gleefully hinted, would be the next manifestation. . . And so it went on.

Fleet Street's little joke lasted for two or three days; then a murder or a divorce or some other sensation took the place of the green pixies and Fleet Street forgot the Forest of Dean until, with the Trial of Mrs. Pace, a new nine days' wonder came out of it. The Foresters themselves were puzzled and rather shy. Strange that London folk should set so much store by the pixies! And now, several years afterwards, they are still puzzled and shy, and they are just beginning to suspect that somebody was pulling their legs. In ten years' time they will probably begin to be angry.

For my part, I am full of sympathy with the Foresters. I like not these daily journalists and their long noses. As for the little green gnomes—why not? At the bottom of a very deep mine, in the middle of a very dark forest—you can scarcely think of a more likely place for the finding of a gnome!

But the person I am most sorry for is the pixie who was found in the coal-scuttle. He must have been

asleep while the coal was brought up from the mine, and he only awakened just in time to escape being put on the fire. Then the goodwife went for him with the broom, since it is a fine old English tradition that whenever one sees any strange or unusual creature one shall immediately kill it—since it is more than likely to be a beetle. The poor little pixie hopped out of the door before the goodwife could catch him, and I hope he found his way back to his mine, none the worse for his adventure among the mortals.

A peacock butterfly—the first I had seen since last September—led me down the rough path to Coleford, fluttering from stone to stone and spreading its wings as if it made an oblation to the Sun-God. The weather belonged to May rather than to March; it was so warm that I was glad I had left my rucksack behind.

Coleford is a market town, and is somewhat less unpleasing than Cinderford. Nevertheless, when I had had my lunch I was not sorry to leave its dinginess and to take to the woods again. I put away my map in my pocket and wandered down the rides and forest paths wherever my fancy led me; it was dusk when I returned towards Speech House from the direction of Edge End. Now and then the wind sent little scurries of dead beech-leaves running after me down the path, and it was all I could do to prevent myself turning round and looking for a rout of elves. It would be easy enough, I thought, to believe in fairies if one walked often through the Forest at night-time, when the beech-leaves were invisible and the wind was so slight that one could not feel it, and yet still the

tiny feet pattered at one's heels. And if one were foolish enough to run away, how eagerly they would give chase, these brittle-sounding, pattering Nothings that rise up when the wind whispers to them and dance a strange fandango in the rides!

Only beneath the conifers is there silence, are there no whisperings and no pattering feet; but the conifers are dark, and in their shade, perhaps, dwell the silent, the darker things. No fairies here; but an unceasing watchfulness, as if the shadows were thickly peopled and each tree-trunk did sentry-go. And here, perhaps. though his pipe is mute, lurks he that is oldest and youngest, the Goat-footed One. . . .

So I thought, as I hastened away from the trees and came out on the roadway at whose end the lights in the Speech House windows cheerfully welcomed me. As I walked towards them I heard quick steps approaching, and a Forester passed me on his way home. He threw me 'good night' and was gone; and he left me wondering what there was about that 'good night' which made it perceptibly different from any 'good night' I had ever heard before. Its tone was not that of a greeting; neither was it the tone of the townsman's hurried formality, nor that of the South Countryman's invitation to stop and talk. Where had I heard that sharp, questioning note before?

Suddenly I remembered. Orderly officer, turning out the Guard. . . . A sleepy sentry, jumping to attention. . . . The gleam of the bayonet as the rifle came up to the 'on guard'. . . . And then the quick, challenging question: "Who goes there?"

This passing Forester had said 'good night'; and yet the tone was that of 'Who goes there?' His words had been unconsciously a challenge. His forefathers had known the time when it was indeed unsafe to walk alone in the Forest after dark; when the answer to that sharp 'good night' might be the flash of knife or flint-lock, or the yet more dangerous silence which told of a watcher waiting behind the trees. For the Forester, unlike the mountain man, had no hill-top look-out to warn him of a stranger's coming. The reply to his greeting was 'Friend' or 'Foe'; the only other answer was silence, and when he received it the Forester was lucky if he could place his back against a tree.

And so, though perhaps he himself does not know it, the Forester still speaks his 'good night' in the tone of 'Who goes there?' Furthermore, if he chances to meet three men at evening, and one of them is a stranger, he says "Good evening... two of you," and passes on. He has never quite forgotten that a stranger in the Forest was almost always a foe.

VI

Impious though I be, I share with pious men, such as Izaak Walton, John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, and Dr. Montague James, an indefensible liking for ghost-stories. I found in the bar at the Speech House a man who could tell me several, and so I sat up half the night, mixing beer and spectres.

And indeed (if it is true that spirits haunt the scenes where they were wrenched in torment from the

bodies which were once their dwelling-places) the Speech House should have ghosts in plenty. It possesses still the dungeons in which offenders against the Forest laws languished and died; around it stand the great oaks from whose boughs the more fortunate prisoners were hung by the neck until they were dead; and it even has a whipping-post in one of its bedrooms—although, if you have been beaten by prefects in your schooldays, and later learned the art for yourself, you will think that this whipping-post is very badly placed, since there is hardly any room to swing the whip.

The Speech House, in fact, would be a happy haunting ground for any ghost; and it can scarcely lack spirits congenial to it, since so many sheep-stealers and deer-poachers were put to death beneath its roof. (Incidentally, it is amusing to find that among those charged with poaching or receiving venison were many dignitaries of the Church: the Archdeacon and Canons of Hereford, the Abbot of St. Augustine's at Bristol, the Prior of Llanthony, and a number of the monks belonging to Tintern Abbey.)

Yet I am told that the ghostly population of the Speech House is disappointingly small; it is only two. One of these is so strictly conventional that he carries his head in his hands and gallops into the stable-yard with a great clatter on moonlit midnights. The other is a fair lady. Midnight is her time, too; but she is quieter than the Headless Horseman, and she simply walks down the corridor past the bedrooms, proceeds slowly downstairs, and then disappears. She is very

beautiful, but she is also, I am told, very aloof; she has nothing to do with anybody. She does not solace, nor does she affright; and you may walk clean through her without feeling that anything very intimate has occurred.

I looked out for her when I went up to bed; but her hour was long past, and I did not even hear the rustle of her frock's hem as she vanished round a corner. If she came later, she found me asleep; but I fancy that she is a very virtuous lady, though she is so beautiful, and one who would scorn the invitation of an unlatched bedroom door.

VII

Next morning I packed my rucksack and set off towards Tintern, and the Marches of Wales.

My route took me through Parkend, Bream, and St. Briavels to Brockweir Bridge across the River Wye. The first two villages—Parkend and Bream—gave me the answer to a question which I had been asking myself ever since I discovered the Forest of Dean. The question was: Why is the Forest so little visited and so little known? The answer which rose to my mind now was simply that any district which permitted the existence of villages like Parkend and Bream did not deserve to be visited or known at all. There is a corner at Parkend which is more miserably dingy than anything I have ever seen in an industrial town. A row of greyish houses stand with their backs to the main road. Between them and the road lies an expanse of waste-land which I suppose might be

33

4

called a common—except that the word 'common' is usually associated with grassland. This common is entirely devoid of vegetation; in fact, it is a sort of mudflat. It is bounded by a filthy brook, the road, and the blank-looking, expressionless backs of the row of houses. It is covered with the most horrible higgledy-piggledy collection of huts, sties, scratchingpens, hen-coops, and rubbish that I have ever seen. Old boots, tins, and scrap-iron lie about on it; and above it, from a network of clothes-lines, waves tatterdemalion washing that looks rather like a distress-signal raised by shipwrecked mariners on a desert island. It is the most dismal, desolate place you have ever set eyes on: a rubbish-tip would be jolly by comparison. I would rather live in Bolton or Wigan than in this particular corner of Parkend.

Bream, a big village which has practically blotted out the top of a hill, is simply a disgrace. Within the space of about four acres, at one end of the village, there is a decent, dignified war memorial; a butcher's shop in a little wooden hut; another shop in a tin shanty which has a rust-red corrugated roof and ochre sides picked out in bright green; and finally a bungalow of the type which one sees at Bognor Regis, with prawn-pink roof and green veranda.

The greater part of this mess is plastered with posters, notice-boards, etc., of horrible design. In conclusion, let me add that the unpleasing rubbish of Bream appears to be used to fill up a ditch that runs beside the road.

Now presumably Bream wants people to visit it. It possesses inns, shops, and cottages which provide

PARKEND!

'Teas and bed and breakfast'. Yet I should think that if a single traveller happens upon Bream and does not hasten through without pausing, Bream is getting a great deal more than it deserves. What it actually does deserve is either a Town Planning Act or a stick of gelignite.

I have already emphasised that coal-mining has not spoiled the Forest of Dean, which still possesses views as lovely as any that I know. Even the pit-heads themselves do not greatly sully it. But bad, greedy, and haphazard building, in such villages as Bream, and dull, hopeless, unimaginative building, in such towns as Cinderford, have left upon it blots far worse than those made by industry. I believe there is an organisation known as the Forest of Dean Development Association. I commend to it as three worthy objects the replanning of Cinderford, the tidying-up of Parkend, and the demolition of the greater part of the village of Bream.

St. Briavels, like Bream, stands upon a hill; but St. Briavels is unspoilt and lovely, and looks down with a quiet dignity upon the twisting Wye and across it to the wooded slopes behind Llandogo. The ruined walls of its castle are a roosting-place for the jackdaws, yet the old border fortress is still proud on its hilltop, as if it remembers that more than once the Royal Standard has flown from its flagstaff, when a King of England came to the Forest to hunt the deer and the wild boar.

From St. Briavels a steep track called Sandy Lane leads to Brockweir and the River Wye. Down this path I jogged with aching ankles—for I had come

twelve miles already this morning, and I was not yet in training for a long tramp. Nevertheless, the view was a cure for any weariness. I was now at the edge of the Forest, and I had a sense of having come out of darkness into light. The sky was wider. The valley of the Wye, from Tintern up to Redbrook, shone below me in the sunlight. Away on my left the steep thickets of Tidenham Chase ran along the cliffs beside the river almost as far as Chepstow, beyond which, in the V made by the junction of the Severn and the Wye, the landscape sloped down towards the estuary. Before me rose the little tumbled hills that stand between the river and the mountains—those hills which are like big haycocks, and which I wrote about in my first novel, Dixon's Cubs.

It was a delectable countryside; and feeling rather as if I had looked upon the Promised Land I hastened down steep Sandy Lane and did not once pause for rest until I could hear the slow whisper of the river at Brockweir; and then, when I had sat for a few minutes on the bridge, and listened to the pleasant hiss of the water running past the piles, I slung my rucksack on my shoulders again, and crossed the Wye into the land which is the beginning of Wales.

DIGRESSION (1)

ON THE CITY OF CARDIFF

POOR READER of this book, you are in the situation of a person handcuffed to me. Where I go, you must go also. My pace must be yours. When I hasten, you must hasten; when I pause to admire a view or drink a pint of beer, you must pause also. If my whim takes me to the top of a mountain or the bottom of a pit-shaft, up or down you are dragged willy-nilly with me. I am afraid there is no escape for you, except by ceasing to be a reader.

Now it happened that when I reached Chepstow at the end of my walk through the Forest, and collected my letters from the Post Office there, I found that I had to go to Cardiff on business. Accordingly I got into a very slow train which crept beside the muddy estuary as far as Severn Tunnel Junction, where I changed to another slow and infuriating train which crawled to Newport; and then I changed for the third time to a slightly faster train which eventually brought me to my destination.

The name of Cardiff, to those who have never been there, signifies a dirty, dingy coal-port, smoke and darkness and tall chimneys, and mean dockside streets. Actually, Cardiff is one of the most splendid modern cities I know. Its architecture is far better than that

of most provincial towns; its streets are bright and wide; it is light and airy and excellently planned; and there is nothing mean about it anywhere.

Of course, Cardiff is a puritan city; that is to say, it is governed by City Fathers who seem to regard drinking and dancing as a form of supping with the devil, who faintly disapprove of theatres and strongly disapprove of cinemas, and who (I believe) forbade M. Maurice Chevalier to visit their town because they thought that one of his pleasant little French songs was indecent. In consequence of this attitude, Cardiff on Sunday is like the wrath of God; in fact, it is the wrath of God-of a private and particular God worshipped by Cardiff's City Fathers. Thus, on the Sabbath of the Lord their God, one may not purchase in Cardiff a single drop of what they call 'alcoholic liquor'. (Consider the minds of men who can designate good Burgundy 'alcoholic liquor'; Liebfraumilch 'alcoholic liquor'; all the blessed and sacred wines that come from the South and the sunshine heaped together under the blasphemous collective title 'alcoholic liquor'! O God! O Montreal!) In Cardiff also, on the Sabbath day, one may not dance, go to the cinema, nor listen to light music. I have not ascertained whether one may visit the Museum, but I suspect that stones and skeletons are held to be as damnable on Sundays as concerts and cinemas; for the Municipal Mind works in a mysterious way, and it believes that whereas it is uplifting to look at a sperm whale or a cuttlefish at noon on Saturday, it is immoral to inspect the same sperm whale or cuttlefish twenty-four hours later.

ON THE CITY OF CARDIFF

Besides, Mr. A. P. Herbert has pointed out that when the Parks and the cinemas and the dance-halls are closed, the Municipal Museum may be used by lovers who are more interested in each other's anatomy than in that of the Ichthyosaurus:

"Nowhere to go,
Nowhere to kiss,
Mustn't do that,
And mustn't do this.
But there's the Museum, and there without fail
We hug in a corner behind a stuffed whale;
But oh my! the keepers do pry,
And I often wish
There was some bigger fish
On a dreary, drizzly,
Granny's own grizzly,
Mouldy, Municipal Sunday."

I am sure the City Fathers of Cardiff would not like their Museum to be used for such a purpose; so I expect it is closed on Sunday, or filled with women policemen, who are the Gabriels of the Puritan God.

But it is not only on Sunday that He inflicts His taboos upon the suffering citizens of Cardiff. Even on week-days His servants, the City Fathers, are extremely reluctant to permit anyone to dance in a 'public place' (within the meaning of the Act, of course) after the hour of midnight; and they are still more reluctant to allow anyone to drink and dance at the same time and upon the same premises. The same Municipal Mind, which blasphemes the name of

Burgundy and bans M. Chevalier, treats grown-ups like children and sends them to bed at twelve. One can easily imagine how the Mind works: "Two o'clock, dear, dear! Dreadful things happen at two o'clock in the morning! Eleven o'clock, now, that's a Safe Hour. People don't get seduced at eleven o'clock, do they, Mr. Councillor? Oh no; but at five past twelve-well, that's a dark and dirty hour, Mr. Councillor. People become abandoned at five past twelve. Let us therefore close all 'public places' (within the meaning of the Act, of course) at twelve o'clock precisely. And drink, you say! Dear, dear! If people insist upon dancing, we must punish them for it somehow! We must make them drink lemonade. or those nasty fizzy green and yellow drinks. No alcoholic liquor, mind! When people drink alcoholic liquor at a dance, Mr. Councillor, they become very abandoned. They do terrible things. They even kiss in 'public places' (within the meaning of the Act, of course). Terrible, terrible. And they are more easily seduced. We must prevent them being seduced, Mr. Councillor. No alcoholic liquor, and close at twelve!"

O God! O Montreal!

Nevertheless, Cardiff appears to enjoy itself, and succeeds in being a very pleasant place, in spite of its City Fathers. I have seen more gay and pretty girls in Cardiff than I have seen anywhere else except in Edinburgh. Somehow, pretty girls seem to flourish in puritan cities; post hoc, propter hoc perhaps! Certainly, you'll get more inviting and delightful smiles in St. Mary's Street, Cardiff, and Princes

ON THE CITY OF CARDIFF

Street, Edinburgh than you'll get on all the sea fronts and promenades of Brighton and Blackpool and Margate!

Incidentally, it is also worthy of notice, as a curious comment on puritanism, that you will see ten times as many drunken men and women on one Saturday night at Cardiff or Edinburgh, where the public-houses shut at ten, than you will see in six weeks in France, Italy, or Spain, where the cafés are open all the time.

When I had done my business, I did not immediately return to Chepstow; I walked down St. Mary's Street, turned to the left at the bottom, and crossed the iron bridge which divides the part of Cardiff which is gracious and light from the part which is sterner and dark. Ships, like horses, are irresistible to me; but I hope, my poor handcuffed Reader, that you are not a Respectable Person, for Respectable Persons do not walk down Bute Street even by day. If they have business there, they go by car or by tram; and at night they have no need to set foot in Bute Street at all. For there is only one sort of business which is carried on in that district at nighttime, and that is a dark business: its merchandise is not the concern of Respectable Persons. So when the night comes, and the few lamps are lit, Bute Street is left to the seamen and the little Chinese and the Negroes and the Lascar stokers and the Arabs . . . and the girls.

It was late afternoon when I set off towards the Docks. Bute Street was almost deserted. By day it is always dull and characterless. It presents to the

stranger a completely blank expression, as if it were a suspected person about to be searched by a policeman. It is neither furtive nor secret; it dare not be. It is apparently devoid of feeling, like the faces of those little yellow men who haunt it.

The last time I had walked along it I was on my way to Gibraltar, and I was going to the Customs Office to induce a friend to sign a form indemnifying the owners of a collier against the cost of my repatriation or burial abroad. Bute Street was busier then; to-day it was almost empty. The presence of a solitary policeman intensified its loneliness, just as a single note of music deepens the silence into which it falls.

I caught up with the policeman and walked beside him. He seemed to be glad of my company; the little blank-faced houses are not very friendly towards the police. "Very quiet?" I ventured. "Used to be livelier than this?" He nodded.

"It's this Depression, you see."

"Yes."

"Bute Street's a luxury trade," he grinned.

We passed a dim-faced, sick-looking girl who studiously avoided the policeman's eye.

"Luxury, you said?" I asked suddenly.

The policeman looked slightly uncomfortable.

"Well, I suppose it's luxury to them."

"I expect you're right. Most things are relative." The policeman nodded.

"I was in Mespot," he said. "Wounded. Bloody hot. I found some green stinking water in a well. Smelt like rotten eggs. But I wanted that water more

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than I've ever wanted a drink since. Relative, as you say!" He shrugged his shoulders and paused.

"End of my beat here. Going down to the Docks? Well, good night, sir."

I went on through a maze of sheds and railway trucks until I could smell the sea, until the funnels and the tall masts of the ships rose up like a forest in front of me. At 'Number Twenty-three Tip', where I had boarded that ancient wallowing collier, there was another, taller ship, the Lolita, coaling in a hurry. The last half-dozen five-ton truckloads of coal were thundering down into her forward holds. The trimmers, grimy and sweating, were swearing in Welsh as they levelled the heaps of coal. One of the ship's officers stood on the bridge watching their progress, with a half-anxious, half-patient look on his face; he was wondering whether the Lolita would catch the evening tide.

The clouds of coal-dust which hung about her blurred the shape of her hull and made her look strangely beautiful, just as the deliberately untidy strokes of an artist in charcoal take away the harshness from a picture and invest it with a sort of mystery. I looked away from her and across the Docks, and perceived that the whole scene had undergone a sudden transformation. What had been stern and grim and unlovely a few minutes ago had now the delicacy and grace of an etching. An evening mist had come up from the sea and the forest of masts and derricks showed through it faintly, as if they were lightly-pencilled in the sky. The cranes at the other side of the dock had the same finely-drawn appear-

ance, and they were very tall and slender, so that they reminded me of a herd of giraffes raising their delicate necks and turning their heads to find out what news the breeze was bringing. And now the riding-lights of twenty steamers began to wink out one by one, yellow and a little blurred, like stars in a cloudy sky. The coal-dust hovered about the tips like an intermittent smoke, rising and falling. Far away beyond the mast-heads a tramp was going out to sea. The smoke from her funnel made a long, wavy pencil-line across the afterglow of the sunset.

The Lolita had finished at last. The covers were on her hatches, and she was getting up steam. Her whistle blew shrilly for the dock-pilot, and the sound seemed to quiver on the evening air, as the last call of a hunting-horn does at the end of a winter day. Her after donkey-engine rattled as it took in the slack of the hawser. The trimmers, black-faced, staring-white-eyed, somehow unreal, came ashore in a chattering crowd.

Then the Lolita's paddle churned up a witches' brew of white and brownish foam about her stern. Her green starboard-light glowed suddenly, her masthead lamp went up with a rattle of pulleys. She began to swing slowly away from the wall, taking her departure without ceremony and without fuss, as is the way of tramp-steamers. I wondered whither she was bound.

I watched her till she was lost in the mist and the darkness; then I went back across the network of railway-lines towards Bute Street. I had just enough time to catch my train.

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Bute Street had changed with the coming of the night. It was no longer blank-looking, expressionless, still. Its secret life was busily astir. Lascars, walking with their peculiar slouch, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched, went to and fro along the pavements. The 'cafés' were brightly lit and seamen went in and out of them—Chinese, Negro, Lascar, English: flotsam and jetsam thrown up by the tide. Bute Street's bitter 'luxury trade' was in full swing. Its merchandise passed me and repassed. "Hello, dearie." "No, thanks." "Well, you are standoffish to-night." "Sorry, my dear: no go! Good hunting!"

At last I came to the Cardiff end of the street, where the lights are brighter and the little 'cafés' fewer (for their business comes not from the city but from the sea). A policeman, standing at the corner, eyed me curiously, as if he said to himself: "What's he been doing, down Bute Street at night-time?" I turned the corner, crossed the iron bridge, and was back in the Puritan City, where a man may not buy a glass of beer on Sunday.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WYE VALLEY

1

I STAYED one night at Tintern, at the very delightful hotel kept by Captain Sharp and called the Beaufort Arms. (It is a pleasure to mention a good hotel by name; it would be a still greater pleasure if the law permitted me publicly to denounce the bad ones.)

From the front windows of the Beaufort Arms, one looks across the road at the grey skeleton of Tintern Abbey, which stands beside the Wye. It is a strangely beautiful skeleton, and its bare bones somehow preserve the lines of its loveliness, like the finely-moulded skull of a very handsome woman, which retains a little of its charm even when the flesh is gone from it.

Northward and southward, the Wye winds past Monmouth and Chepstow. Thick woods rise steeply from its banks—islands and peninsulas of woodland, whose mainland is the Forest of Dean. The road between Chepstow race-course and Monmouth town goes beside the Wye through some of the sweetest English countryside I know; and at present it is practically unspoilt. I write 'at present' advisedly;

for the greed of the jerry-builder, the garage man, and the roadside café proprietor knows no bounds, and it would be daring even to hope that the Wye Valley will escape their clutches for long. The people whose concern it should be to save their own countryside from the desecrators are for the most part apathetic and stupid themselves. If only our slow English countryfolk were fiercer and more volatile! If only they would burn a few jerry-built bungalows and tear down a few tin cafés and light their fires with a few ugly notice-boards as the Foresters lit their fires with the fence which the Crown put up to enclose a wood! But I'm afraid there's no hope of that; we shall awaken when the best of England looks like Bognor Regis-and then it will be too late. Meanwhile, one or two people write to the papers about it and we, who have forgotten how to be angry, call that 'a protest'. Somebody answers the letters, and we call that 'a bitter controversy'. Therein, perhaps, lies the whole tragedy of our generation and of England. We are ready enough with our pens; we have forgotten the hatchet and the fire-brand!

I walked from Chepstow to Tintern with a young man who lived at Llandogo and who knew and loved the whole valley. He took me to a point on the road from which he said I should see the most beautiful view in the district. He was proud of it. "Look!" he said. "Do you know anything that can beat it, anywhere?" Then he added gravely:

"There ought to be a tea-garden here, rightly; so that people could look at the view while they ate their tea."

CHAPTER TWO

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"There ought to be a tea-garden here, rightly; so that people could look at the view while they ate their tea."

I raised my eyebrows.

"One with big orange umbrellas over the tables?" I said, half-laughing at him.

He nodded quite seriously.

"Well, that sort's certainly very nice."

Since that young man, and young men like him, are the custodians of their own inheritance, the best view in the whole of the Wye Valley will probably be blotted out in a year or two with a toadstool growth of orange umbrellas; and not one of us will have the courage to soak them with petrol and set them alight.

II

I left Tintern and walked up the valley towards Monmouth, on a very warm afternoon; it was a sort of mock summer in March.

The road winds with the river, so that on the map they are red and blue ribbons laid together. Tintern is a long village, and it stretches from its old Abbey to the bridge at Brockweir: an inch-long loop in the ribbons, a mile by river or by road. Thereafter the road goes more straightly to Llandogo. Charming though it is, one is rather relieved to reach the end of Tintern; for Tintern, one feels, is becoming a trifle self-conscious. Too many little shops cater for the visitor and offer mementos of Tintern. One smells faintly the familiar mixture of bad art and craftiness, and one fears for the future of the lovely village. But one can scarcely blame it for being self-conscious, since it is visited by so many American travellers, who seriously sit up all night in the season of the Harvest



Moon in order to see the moonbeams strike through a certain window at Tintern Abbey; for it is then that the spectres walk and the cowled monks are visible to mortal eye. This must seem to the Americans very cute indeed; for I once heard an American lady describe as 'cute', in one devastating breath, the Mosque at Córdoba, the Alhambra at Granada, and the cathedral at Rheims.

Yet Tintern possesses 'cuter' things even than those grey monkish ghosts which the eye of faith may see at harvest time. Behind the village there is a little busky wood which is called the Nightingale Valley; and here on a summer evening one may listen to such a chorus of nightingales as has never, surely, sung before outside the halls of Heaven. It is as if all the tiny tongues which were served on Nero's table were resurrected suddenly, and were singing for joy again.

Beyond Llandogo, I crossed the river by Biggsweir Bridge. Looking downstream from here, I could see the place where I was nearly drowned five years ago. I was otter-hunting with the Wye Valley hounds. It was a blazing hot day in June, but there had been rain during the previous week, and the river was still running high. Hounds were hunting a 'drag' upstream, racing along the bank with a great cry, sterns waving, heads down. Then suddenly, opposite an island in mid-stream, they checked and became silent, until, one by one, each cutting a V-shaped wash with his flat head, they swam across to the island. There they crowded round an old broken willow-tree and began to yell. They had marked their otter for sure;

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even old Windsor, a staid, cautious, doubting-Thomas of a hound, was lifting up his head and howling "He's there!"

Now it happened that I was on the wrong side of the river. The channel between the island and the bank was shallow on the left side and deep on the right. I was on the right bank, whereas most of the Field were on the left. I saw the figures in blue uniforms splashing their way across to the little willow-covered island. On my side of the river there was only one other person besides myself. He was a very big and heavy man, and he was a soldier—the Adjutant of my Territorial Regiment.

It seemed very important that we should reach the island and watch old Windsor put the otter down. We waded out and inspected the channel. The river was clear, and it was possible to see the bottom all the way. The greatest depth seemed to be about four feet.

"Bobbie," said I, "do you think we could wade across that?"

"Can do," he said briefly.

"If we slip, Bobbie, we shall probably be drowned. Do you mind much?"

Bobbie said he didn't mind. We therefore transferred our cigarettes and matches to the breast-pockets of our coats and walked out into the stream. Thighdeep, we felt the river tugging eagerly at our feet. Waist-deep, my pole slipped and I nearly fell. We went slowly on, pushing out one foot at a time, then leaning on our poles and dragging the second foot after the first. The swift stream sang a little hissing

song about us as it gurgled past. There was an almost intolerable weight about our knees.

Now I had the advantage of Bobbie in height, but he was far better off than I was in the matter of weight. His fifteen-stone stood solid and immovable while the water surged round it; he was rather like the pile of a bridge. My own eleven-stone-eight was much less secure. I knew that if my pole slipped I was done.

At last I reached the deepest part of the channel and stood still to get my breath, while a trickle of water ran into my breast pocket. I remember thinking absurdly that since my cigarettes were spoiled anyhow I might as well let go and trust to luck that I came up safely on a shallow; but the river was running too fast for that, and I thought that I should probably crack my head on a rock before I rolled aground.

I noticed that the uniformed figures on the island had now left the neighbourhood of the willow-tree and clustered on the shore. For the moment, we were of greater interest even than otters. People began to shout advice, and a very stupid woman called out: "Can you swim?"—as if anybody could have swum a stroke in that racing torrent.

I now began to feel extremely ill, for no reason at all that I could think of. (At midnight, thirty-six hours later, a surgeon hurriedly whipped out my appendix; this was the first twinge of it.) I decided that I must make a plunge towards the shallow water at once. I pushed out my left leg, found a foothold, thrust my pole against a big stone, and heaved myself forward; and suddenly the big stone gave way.

Then the most extraordinary thing happened.

I did not roll over, as I had expected I should, but I went spinning down the river in an upright position, like a top, touching bottom with my feet two or three times every second. I saw Bobbie's face turned towards me, amazed and apprehensive. He leaned on his pole and watched me, powerless to help, since if he had moved a foot downstream he would have been bowled over like a shot rabbit.

Suddenly I did a complete pitchpoll, bumped my ankle on a sharp rock, and found myself kneeling on a spit of sand over which six inches of water quietly trickled. I began to feel better, stood up, and splashed towards the island in time to watch Bobbie, as solid as a battleship, ploughing his way to shore. Five minutes later the otter shot out of the willow-tree like a torpedo from a vessel's side. Windsor, Viper, Warrior, Viscount, Bellman, Barmaid and all the rest of them yelled and whimpered as they jumped into the river; and we went racing after them as they hunted downstream.

This afternoon, when I had rested for a few minutes at Biggsweir, I went on slowly to Redbrook. On the top of the cliff above me Offa's amazing dyke had followed the course of the Wye, shutting out England from Wales. Below it, the river formed a second line of defence, fordable only at a few well-guarded points; certainly not fordable at the place where Bobbie and I had crossed it!

The sudden warm weather had made me very lazy, and although I had only walked a few miles, I felt tired of the hard tarmac. However, there was no

other way to Monmouth, and I should have had to have gone on, 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'igh road, had there not overtaken me at Redbrook a most blessed and a most cursed bus. Blessed because it offered relief to my sore feet; cursed because of the disaster which it brought to me. It was a very countrified bus, occupied solely by the driver, the conductor, and a very countrified old woman, who was going into Monmouth with two big baskets of eggs, which she had placed immediately in front of her seat at the rear of the bus. I saw no reason to stop the bus completely, and as it slowed down I boarded it as I should board a bus in London—right hand on the rail, right foot on the step, and then a jump. My jump took me aboard all right, but it also took me right into the middle of the biggest basket. My feet, shod with heavy nailed boots, landed with a terrible crunch on top of several dozen eggs, whose volks flew up in a vellow spatter all over the old woman's skirt.

Luckily for me, it was a season when eggs were cheap. These cost me a penny each; the computation thereof occupied the rest of the journey, and the conductor—as umpire—eventually awarded damages of four and twopence to the old woman. We all laughed so loudly that the driver looked round to see what the noise was about, and when we told him he burst out laughing too, and had to stop the bus until he had finished.

Ш

"I can tell you, there is goot men porn at Monmouth," said the pedantic and insufferable Fluellen in $King\ Henry\ V$; and, comparing the birthplace of Alexander with that of King Harry, he said to Gower: "I tell you, Captain,—If you look in the maps of the 'orld, I warrant, you shall find, in the comparisons between Macedon and Monmouth, that the situations, look you, is both alike. There is a river in Macedon; and there is also moreover a river at Monmouth; it is called Wye at Monmouth; but it is out of my prains, what is the name of the other river; but 'tis all one, 'tis so like as my fingers is to my fingers, and there is salmons in both."

The last statement is incorrect; for it has been learnedly pointed out by Mr. William Radcliffe that though there are 'salmons' in the Wye, there are none in the rivers of Macedonia. Over this question fierce controversies have arisen, between the ichthyologists and the Shakespearean scholars—the former declaring that since Salmo salar is not found in the Mediterranean, Shakespeare was talking through his hat, and the latter arguing that Shakespeare intended the term 'salmons' to include other species of the genus Salmo (such as S. obtusirosis); or, alternatively, that if Shakespeare was inaccurate, he was inaccurate deliberately in order to make a butt of Fluellen. . . .

How very comical these Higher Critics are! If only one could be certain of posthumous fame, what fun it would be to set little traps for them, cunningly-

contrived, easily-sprung mousetraps baited with ambiguities and variorum readings! And oh! how pleasant 'twould be to watch, from the Place whither one's spirit journeyed, the little critics crawling eagerly into the traps and (when they were safely caught) rending each other to pieces because they disagreed over the definition of the word 'cheese'!

Fluellen did not know much about Macedon, but he was right to be proud of Monmouth. It is a delightful old town, very typically a town of the Marches, and it is not yet infected with the self-consciousness which is spoiling Tintern. It welcomes visitors, but it does not insist upon selling them postcards and pink sugar rock; nor is it, like Broadway, arty and exceedingly crafty in the picking of American pockets. It is just an old, dignified, decent little town, which smiles frankly at you and lets you go your way. It doesn't clutch at your sleeve, as it were, and wheedle 'Come and buy this' or 'Come and look at that'. It has none of the harlotry of a beauty spot. It regards a visitor as a guest rather than as a heaven-sent prey who has walked into its spider's web.

The Wye is joined at Monmouth by the merriest, most lovable little river in the world: the Monnow, which comes tumbling down through the woods from the wild hills. For the man who wants to spend a week-end alone, and who likes hard walking, little-known countryside, and finding rare flowers, I can think of no better journey than a pilgrimage in summer from the mouth of the Monnow to its source. There is a sense of achievement in having followed a river

for every yard of its way, cutting no corners and baulking at no awkward crossings; and there is a sort of mystery too—one feels one is chasing a dream. Besides, Mr. Belloc holds that there is virtue to be gained by drinking of a great or loved river's source; and since the source is the innermost shrine of a river it should surely be approached humbly, per arduus, by going upstream from the mouth.

I remember once seeking the source of the Severn on Plynlymon Fawr; for I had vowed that I would pay tribute, in Mr. Belloc's fashion, to the river I love most next to the Thames. Alas, I must confess that I never did so. I met some gipsy pedlars on my way to the mountain and rode far with them on one of their ponies, forgetting my high purpose altogether. I atoned later by finding the sources of the Usk and the Wye; and from Thames Head I have drunk many times. But to this day I do not know in what green bog or in what witches' cauldron formed of smooth boulders the great Severn is born.

Rivers are a hobby of mine, and I have a queer fancy about them: that they possess characters of their own, that each has a sort of personality. Thus Thames is a proud and dignified river; it can never forget that it flows towards a great University and a great school and a great Metropolis towards which all things flow—and so it has a proper sense of its own importance. Then the Warwickshire Avon remembers Shakespeare, I am sure, and tells tales of him in its song. The Till is a wicked, evil-hearted river; for there is the old Scottish rhyme:

"Tweed said to Till,
"What gars ye rin sae still?"—
Till said to Tweed,
"Though ye rin wi' speed,
And I rin slaw,
Where ye droun ae man,
I droun twa."

That's the sort of River the Till is. And Humber is a dour Yorkshireman, as you can tell by a glimpse of him. And Severn-I am not quite sure yet about Severn. He has some of the mystery of Wales about him, and I think he has mischief, too—a slow humour like that of the Gloucestershire folk. Wye is a river of the Marches, it has the magic of the Marches; and it has seen bitter things. Usk is surely a maiden, it has the air and the primrose sweetness of a very young maiden, as graceful as a gazelle. And this little Monnow, that bubbles over its stony shallows, tears down hillsides, and hides itself in woods-I do not know what Monnow's character is, and I must leave that discovery to the man who walks all the way up it, past Skenfrith, past Grosmont, back beside the river to Pandy, and then up through the foothills of the Black Mountains to its source on Pen-v-beacon, 2219 feet high.

This evening, when my bus brought me into Monmouth, yolk-spattered and the poorer by four-and-two, I left my rucksack at an hotel and walked for a mile or two towards that source. The full moon rose over the small wooded hills and the river trickled pure silver over its shallows. The night was one of

those warm, moonlit nights which come so rarely in the spring and which are so lovely that they make one restless and somehow unhappy, and send one chasing after dreams. It was a night on which a man should make love, or get very drunk, or write a poem; and yet no mistress would be satisfying, no wine would bring happiness, no poem would seem good enough, on such a night as this.

IV

I had intended to go next day from Monmouth to Abergavenny; but in the morning I completely changed my plans and followed the Wye up to Ross. It was another blue day, strayed from some lost June or August; the like of it might never come again in March. If the seasons might thus make sport with their ordered procession, then why not I with my trivial time-table?

Ross was right off my route; but I suddenly decided that I wanted to go to Ross, and the scrap of paper on which I had jotted down my plans was torn up straightway and cast into the Wye. I am quite shameless about it. I believe that the upsetting of preconceived plans and the tearing up of time-tables is one of the things which makes a walking-tour worth while. It is dull and dismal indeed to feel that you must reach a certain destination on a particular day; that you cannot, for some sweet, crazy whim, suddenly go east instead of west, or dawdle instead of hastening, or climb a mountain instead of going down into a valley. The time-table is the curse of travel.

Unless you are very careful, it becomes your master and goads you along unmercifully, perpetually pricking you with the fear of lost hours and minutes.

There is a sort of travel which is like a drug. A small dose, perhaps, is intoxicant and inspiring, but take a single drachm too much and you become an addict-and then you are dead and damned. You go on and on, faster and faster, and there is no peace to be had anywhere. You grow to hate trains and timetables and travel-agencies, you become desperately weary of ships and buses and aeroplanes, you are sick of sightseeing-and yet you go on. You cannot help it; the drug is your master, and you experience a terrible restlessness which causes you to increase the dose, to travel faster and farther, to see more cathedrals and more places of interest, and more beauty spots and more wonders of the world-until there is no interest nor wonder left in you, and no beauty to be seen. And all the time something inside you is crying out for rest and quietude, and a respite from wandering.

I once met a middle-aged American lady at an hotel at Málaga, and she was weeping because, though she loved Málaga, she must go on to Majorca next day. She was very rich, and she had spent half her life in travel; and yet she had never found a pleasanter place than Málaga, she said, nor one where she felt more spiritually content. Not even the city of Pittsburgh, Pa., (which was her home, if she could be said to have one) gave her that delightful feeling of restfulness and blessed peace which she had at Málaga; and yet to-morrow she must hurry on to

Palma, she must journey three hundred miles by train and a hundred and fifty miles by steamship, away from heart's ease, because she had arranged to go.

"But surely, madam," I reasoned, "you needn't go on if you don't want to? Why bother? You've got sunshine and palm-trees here, the blue Mediterranean in front of you and the mountains behind. You'll get the same things in Majorca, but you won't get anything more. If you love Malaga, why not stay?"

"You see," she said wretchedly, "I've bought the tickets."

"You're rich. Cancel them, or tear them up."

"I can't," she sobbed. "It isn't a question of money. You see, I've planned to go on. I can't alter my plans now, can I? I've planned to stay a week at Palma and after that I'm going on to Ajaccio; and then Florence and Rome and Naples. . . . " She shook her head; then she added softly:

"I'm so tired, too."

Next day, at the Baños del Carmen, we missed her familiar striped bathing-suit; the Acera de la Marina and the Calle de Larios, down which she would walk so slowly and so assuredly (as if she were indeed in the streets of her home-town) saw her preposterous gigantic sunshade no more. I thought of her that afternoon during my siesta; she would be jolting along in a very hot and uncomfortable train, trying in vain to doze, and seeing, whenever she closed her eyes, the cool blue seas which rippled towards the beach at the Baños del Carmen, Málaga.

Now I suppose if I had been drugged with travel

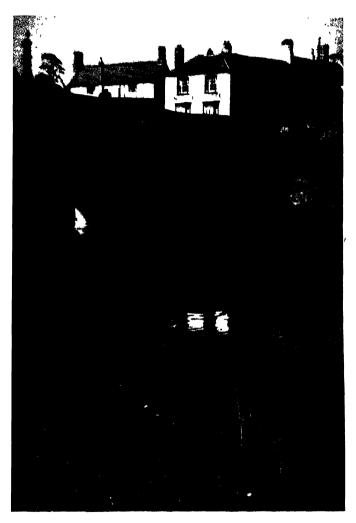
like that American lady, I should have sternly suppressed my sudden wish to go to Ross and should have hastened on to Abergavenny; or if I had been one of those solemn and rather Prussian-minded hikers, who pack loads of mischief on their backs and toil twenty-five miles a day-looking very much like snails—I should have scorned to deviate a yard from my prearranged route because to do so would have seemed a weakness, a wavering from my purpose. Heaven knows what the 'purpose' of such hikers is; it appears to be none other than to struggle along at the maximum speed in conditions of the maximum discomfort, to reach a certain place at evening and there to fall into a sort of dog-tired coma, only to awaken early in the morning and hasten away in the same uncomfortable manner towards somewhere else.

One might really occupy oneself just as profitably in perpetually rolling a stone to the top of a hill and letting it roll down again, like Sisyphus in Hades.

Not the fairest maiden in all the world, not a mermaid nor a fairy nor even Aphrodite herself, could make these grim and set-faced hikers turn aside. I do not believe the Song of the Syrens would make the least impression upon them; for they are somewhat less than human, they are no more susceptible than the snails which they so painfully resemble. For my part, I am made of weaker stuff, and so I went to Ross because I knew I should find a certain lady there. I walked beside the Wye, past all its loveliest reaches, past Symonds Yat and Goodrich Castle, to the flat green meadows whence one looks up at Ross and sees it as a fortress which is always staring anxiously across

the river and wondering when the next raiders will come out of Wales. All these old Border towns—Chepstow, Monmouth, Ross, Ludlow—have a peculiar air of watchfulness. They never go to sleep like English midland towns; they are always on the lookout, waiting for something to happen, and they have never quite forgotten their turbulent past. When the night comes they stand very starkly and darkly against the sky, like unsleeping sentinels. The silhouettes of Ross or of Ludlow Castle, seen against the moon, are beautiful in their watchfulness. They might be forts on the Khyber Pass, looking into Afghanistan.

In the evening, when I had walked and talked with Aphrodite, I returned to Monmouth, whence I set out belatedly towards Abergavenny. The distance was only fourteen miles, but I wanted to see the country, and so I decided not to push on in the darkness. I would stay the night at a wayside inn and complete my journey to Abergavenny in the morning. Soon I found a little public-house and entered it; and in its tiny bar I played darts and shove-ha'penny with some labourers until nearly midnight; and when I went to bed I thanked Heaven that I was not a hiker, for had my mentality been such as theirs I should still have been toiling down the long dark road.



WILTON BRIDGE, ROSS-ON-WYE

[Facing page 62]

DIGRESSION (2)

ON GAMES PLAYED IN PUBS

PLAYING darts-matches to-night with these Monmouthshire labourers, I thought how very grave and formal are the old traditional games which survive in our English inns. 'Councillor Busy and Mr. Nose', who would have us drink the windy waters and who are firmly convinced that the atmosphere of the village inn is one of carousal and debauchery, would be seriously disappointed if they went to the Rose and Crown and watched a game of shove-ha'penny between two old men. It is a very sombre business. It is as slow and dignified and highly specialised as county cricket; and except to the players and to a few knowledgeable lookers-on (the spiritual kin of those hoary ones in the Pavilion at Lord's) it is just as dull. I do not think there is anything less bacchanalian.

Different games flourish in different parts of the country. Here it is all shove-ha'penny, there it is a darts district, here they play table-skittles or quoits, and there they confine themselves to real skittles and scorn the other games as old women's sport. In the Spanish fondas the muleteers play dominoes and dice according to a system which is either too complicated or too simple for my comprehension. It has

been explained to me several times, and the explanation has always run something like this:

"See, señor, your honour does this—so! And now I play—so; and now it is the turn of Ramón—so; and now of Juan; and now of Baldomero; alas, señor, your honour has lost. Qué lástima! Ramón drinks red wine, and Juan drinks sherry, and Baldomero is fond of sherry, too, but for my part I will have a glass of sweet malaga. Good health, senor. Now let us try again. Ramón—Juan—myself—Baldomero—and now your honour will throw. Helas! Madre de dios! Your honour has lost again. We must wish your honour success among the señoritas, for he has no luck with the dice. . . . It is a shame; pero de buena gana beberíamos un vaso de vino. El mísman!—We will have the same again!"

Yes; I am afraid it is a game of great antiquity and great simplicity. Luckily, Spain is a country where wine is cheap.

The chief public-house games of England are skittles, shove-ha'penny, quoits and darts; though here and there the old men play draughts and even ludo, or very simple and very silly games of chance with cards. Skittles deserves a book to itself, and Mr. A. P. Herbert should be the writer. As for the others, a full account of their rules and practice would fill a volume of the Lonsdale Library if some midsummer madness put Messrs. Seeley Service in a sufficiently flippant mood. At least half a dozen chapters would be needed to deal with the infinite variations of shove-ha'penny alone; for such games as these are ruled partly by local tradition, and the

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orthodoxy of Gloucestershire and Devon is the heresy of Northumberland and Kent.

I tried to write down, for inclusion here, the rules of shove-ha'penny and darts, as played in village inns; but they proved to be so complicated, so full of technical terms, and moreover so controversial, that I dare not have them set up in print. They would have to be decided by a council of old men, representative of the different counties, who would argue and quibble over definitions as Parliamentary Committees do, deciding perhaps a single rule a year and issuing an Interim Report in the year 2033, when the last village inn had passed out of existence. There would be something magnificent about such a committee; it would be slower and hoarier than any committee which had ever been appointed before. Its mixture of dialects would be a delight, and its proceedings, literally infinite, would be far more entertaining even than those of the Licensing Commission. It would debate rules like this:

"In the event of any dispute arising as to whether a halfpenny is in a bed, or is tight, the landlord or the barmaid shall be called upon to decide the point and his or her decision shall be final."

To which its members would propose amendments like this:

"That the words 'the landlord and/or the barmaid' shall be substituted for 'the landlord or the barmaid'."

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And then for the next two years a number of old men (the youngest would surely be no less than eightyfive) would shake their heads and mumble into their beards, trying to decide whether the judgment of women was as fair as that of men. The next amendment would run:

"That the words 'unless either of them has a pronounced squint' shall be inserted after the word 'barmaid'."

And so it would go on. Perhaps, however, this rule will not be necessary after all; for some very modern shove-ha'penny boards have a patent device in the form of thin partitions sunk between the lines, which rise up above the level of the board at the pressure of a handle, thus deciding beyond argument which halfpennies are fairly in the beds and which are not. But the old men disapprove of this type of board, because it is new-fangled and because they can solve the question, anyhow, with their own eyes. Also, they never dispute the decision of their opponent, and pressing the handle on one of these new boards would be tantamount to questioning his honesty and fairness. They leave argifyin', they say, to the Australian cricketers and the players of Association football.

I can think of another reason why they would reject the new board with its mechanical umpire. A little beer should always be poured upon the board before it is polished at the start of a game, and this would seriously interfere with the working of the

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sunken partitions. Yet it is unthinkable that a shoveha'penny board should not be treated with beer. This is a formality, or perhaps a libation; at any rate, it is never forgotten by the experts. They say it makes the halfpennies run more easily; and they should know, since they can even spin their halfpenny and make it flip back as if it was alive when its edge touches that of another coin.

When I began this chapter I intended to write a full description of the games of shove-ha'penny and darts; but shove-ha'penny is indescribable—it must be learned from the old men at the Rose and Crown. As for darts, it is not so simple as it sounds; it is not merely a matter of throwing things at a board. There are several hundred different ways of playing darts, and I must be content (until I am asked to write that volume in the Lonsdale Library) with describing one only. I choose it because it is a rather ingenious variation and because, though it may offend the purists, it is a very jolly game.

It is called

Cricket Played with Darts.

It may be played by two players or two teams. The winner of the toss has the choice of innings, and may elect either to 'bat' or 'bowl'. He who represents the batting side has first turn, and throws three darts, reckoning his score in the usual way. The bowler now throws three darts, endeavouring to hit the 1 on the board. If he succeeds, he has got his first

wicket and the batsman is out; if he fails, the batsman continues his innings and piles up his score until the bowler succeeds in scoring 1. Then the second batsman plays and goes on scoring until the bowler has hit the 2 and got his second wicket; and so on until the tenth wicket is down, when the score of the ten batsmen is added together. The other side now go in to bat, and the game proceeds until their ten wickets are down. A second innings may be played by both sides, and the rules regarding innings victories, declarations, etc., are the same as in cricket.

A good darts thrower can be almost certain of hitting the I at least once in three throws; but if the bowler is a very eccentric thrower the game becomes too easy for the batsman, who piles up enormous scores. In these circumstances the bowler may be given three objectives instead of one: Io, say, would be l.b.w., 3 would be 'caught', and I would be bowled; while perhaps a bull's eye would score a hat-trick to the bowler, so that the batting side would lose three wickets at once.

An ingenious person, by providing for every cricket possibility, can make the game extremely complicated and esoteric.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BLACK MOUNTAINS

WHEREVER you are, on the road between Monmouth and Abergavenny, you will see the strange and somehow sinister shape of Skirrid Fawr, the Holy Mountain, standing before you. Although it is only 1600 feet high, it seems to dominate the whole scene by reason of its curious contours, just as Cnicht rules over certain valleys in North Wales.

At the northern end of the Holy Mountain is the site of an ancient chapel dedicated to St. Michael. Nevertheless, I have grave doubts of the hill's claim to holiness, for a more disquieting, evil-looking place I have never seen. It looks to me as if it should be used rather for the purpose of Black Magic than for lawful worship; and I strongly suspect that the origins of St. Michael's Chapel were not as blameless as its name leads us to suppose. It would be a cruel and bitter God to whom a man would pray if he went down upon his knees on Skirrid Fawr.

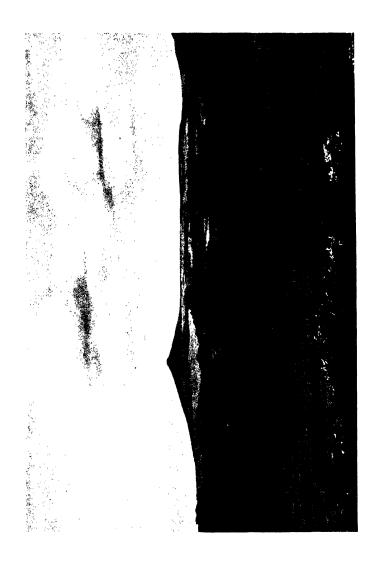
When you come near to Abergavenny, you get your first view of the Sugar Loaf (1955 ft.) whose almost perfect cone makes an odd contrast with the Holy Mountain's savage and disturbing humpiness. Behind it lies the great bleak waste of the Black

Mountains, a lonely highland whose biggest peaks (Waun Fach and Pen-y-Gader Fawr, both over 2600 ft.) are rather uninteresting and undistinguished; they somehow succeed in being unutterably lonely without being terrible or grand.

Past Abergavenny runs the Usk, completing the trinity of lovely rivers which go southward through the Marches. Wye, Monnow, Usk: they are rivers of the woods and the mountains, and they possess all the magic and mystery of the March country. Wye is strongest and swiftest, Monnow is merriest, and Usk, whose way is all flowers in the summer, is perhaps the loveliest. But Usk is not merry and eager like the Monnow; it is rather a grave river, and there always seems to be a note of gentle mockery in the laughter of its rapids, which is a different kind of laughter from that of Monnow and Wye.

Abergavenny is a pleasant old town, rather big and straggling, and I reached it on a Saturday night, when its streets were full of country-folk doing their shopping. Next morning, while it was yet asleep, I walked away from it towards those great hills which lie to the north and the westward. I had altered my plans again and decided to do the walk to Talgarth in one day instead of two: twenty miles, and some stiff climbing—but the weather was so spring-like that I should not have minded the prospect of thirty.

It was eight o'clock when I walked out of Abergavenny and took the Pentre Lane which leads to the right off the Brecon main road. It was an amazingly clear day, and there was a quality about the bright



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sunshine and the very blue sky which made the bare green hills look rather like those hills which you see when you sail up the mouth of the Tagus towards Lisbon. A few whitewashed houses on the lower slopes completed the illusion; I might have been walking into Portugal instead of into Wales!

I climbed up a very steep path through some woods and came out on a barren hillside, with the Sugar Loaf a mile away on my right hand. I had told myself that I would skirt it and go on towards Talgarth; I should have plenty of hill-walking later in the day. But whenever I see a mountain I feel that I must stand on the top of it, and the Sugar Loaf, so clear-cut and perfectly shaped, was irresistible. I told myself that I should be cursing it later in the day, when I toiled up the long pass beneath the cliffs of Mynydd Llysiau; but it was impossible to be solemn and cautious on such a morning as this, so I shrugged my shoulders and took the footpath to the right. The Sugar Loaf, standing directly in front of me, cut a perfect triangle out of the sky.

I reached the top after an hour's hard walking, and as I stood smoking my pipe and staring towards the north-west, where beyond these Black Mountains lay the tall Brecon Beacons and the dark peaks of Carmarthenshire, I was astonished to hear a voice at my shoulder. I had thought there was not a single human being within several miles of me, and I nearly jumped out of my skin. I turned sharply, to see a tall man with a tired face and a slightly sardonic expression standing immediately behind me. He had

come up on the other side of the mountain and his feet had made no sound on the soft turf. I grinned and said: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" He bowed. "Mr. Stanley?" We shook hands, and then he repeated the rather odd remark which he had made when he first spoke to me. His tone was decidedly brusque, and he said briefly:

"Hate views. Don't you?"

I laughed.

"You shouldn't climb mountains, then."

"Climb mountains to get to the top. No other reason."

I began to like this man, and I approved his honesty. I too climb mountains in order to get to the top, and I have a slight contempt for the people who go up them (usually by funicular railway) solely for the purpose of looking at the view.

"Hiking?" asked the stranger, eyeing my rucksack with a certain amount of mistrust. I said: "If you like. I call it walking." I was conscious that he disapproved of my rucksack, and so I added defensively: "I've got to have something to carry my kit in. I'm off for a fortnight. You just out for the day?"

"Be damned!" he said. "Three weeks."

"But you haven't got any kit!"

"Pyjamas in pocket. Toothbrush. Razor. Sir Thomas Browne."

Now perhaps I am very stupid; but this curious person talked in such an abrupt manner, clipping his sentences till only their bare skeletons were left, that at first I was completely bewildered. I begged his pardon, and he solemnly produced from his pockets

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a pair of green silk pyjamas, tightly rolled up, a tooth-brush and a safety razor, and two little books, the Religio Medici and Hydriotaphia. I nodded, and he replaced these his possessions carefully in his pockets. I forbore to say that I considered the prose of Sir Thomas Browne more suitable for the armchair in the study than for the windy mountainside; for my part, if I cluttered up my pockets with books, I should take Chaucer or Walton, Hudson or Edward Thomas, or a little (and the best) of William Wordsworth. As it is, the bulges in my coat are most unacademic ones: pipe, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, a first-aid case, and a flask!

I said to the stranger:

"No coat? What happens if it rains?"

"Get wet," he replied briefly, as if he told me that I was a fool. Then he said suddenly: "Let's get away from this view. Positive panorama. Sort of thing Baedeker slobbers about. Going down. You coming? Which way?"

"Roughly north," I said.

He nodded.

"Walk together."

I was now becoming used to those clipped phrases, those sentences which had but a few nouns and verbs for vertebræ, and which I must clothe with meaning as an anatomist reconstructs from a few bones the living shape of a Saurian. So I learned, on the way down the north slope of the Sugar Loaf, that this stranger was a doctor with a big practice in the East End; that he worked about fourteen hours a day and was always in a tearing hurry; that he took three weeks'

holiday every two years and spent it thus, walking among the mountains; and that he, like me, was on his way up the Marches.

"D'you know," I told him, "if I worked as hard as you do, I think I should want a bit of gaiety when I took a holiday. I should go to Paris, or Italy, or the South of France. Don't you get lonely, walking with Sir Thomas Browne?"

He chucked me a handful of vertebræ.

"Lonely—God! Blessed relief. Away from people. If you knew! Last Thursday, before I started. Up all previous night. Confinement. Woman's tenth. Ought to have got rid of it months back. Not allowed. Breakfast. Just pouring out tea, called to accident. Drayman. Crushed foot. Then surgery. Then rounds. No lunch. Then anæsthetics at hospital. Then more rounds. Back at six. Surgery. Packed. Three calls while at dinner. Appendix, pleurisy, suspected dip. Handed over to my locum and caught train at Paddington one-five Friday morning. Just an ordinary day."

We walked together, this tired man and I, for about two miles to the northward. Then he asked me where I was going to put up that night and I told him that I was going over the pass to Talgarth. Would he like to come with me? He vigorously shook his head.

"Talgarth? That's Wales." He unfolded his map. "Look, here goes the Border. Cwm Gwenffryd—Pen-y-fal—Pont Newydd—Grwyne Fawr—up the little river. Know it's Sunday?"

"Yes. Why?"

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"Bloody fool to go west of that line on Sunday.¹ Bloody fool to do so any time. But Sunday particularly. No drinks!"

I laughed.

"Don't you believe it! I'll guarantee to get you a drink at the first pub we find on the west side of the Border!"

"Probably. Go sneaking round back doors. Square the landlord. Pah! Country's uncivilised. Therefore avoid it. God, how I hate this Nonconformist-Liberalism. Tin bethels, prohibition, spying on private lives, and whining to God! Think they've got rights over individuals. Say 'Mustn't drink on Sabbath. Mustn't go to cinemas. Mustn't do this, mustn't do that.' That's Liberalism! Freedom-Heavens! Furtive, filthy-minded, repressed: that's Wales. Humbug and graft and dishonesty. Drunkenness and whoring. Ever been in Wales on a Saturday night? Watch the drunks coming home. Sodden, soused. Beastly sight. Utterly promiscuous, too. Completely a-moral, like all Puritans; and yet they presume to stop me having my glass of beer on Sunday!"

"Steady, doctor!" I said. "You can't draw up an indictment against a nation. Remember Burke?"

"Not indicting a nation. Indicting a school of thought. Puritanism means more drunkenness, more promiscuity, more disease, more illegitimacy. Heard this story? 'Do you know, Mrs. Jones, my daughter

¹I have since discovered that Monmouthshire, on the English side of the Marches, is governed by the Welsh licensing laws and is also a desert on Sundays.

Megan is going to be married next week?' 'Indeed, Mrs. Evans, I had not heard, no. I did not know anything about it. I did not even know that she was pregnant.' That attitude's only possible under Puritanism."

I listened to this fearful blasting with a good deal of admiration. Here was a man who hated well. I am no pacifist; I believe that only by fighting can we make a better world of it and clear up this mess that is twentieth-century civilisation. To fight well, it is necessary to hate well. Nobody wins by compromise. Therefore I liked this ferocious doctor and I cried: "Well said! It's good to hear a man really angry!"

"Excellent reason to be angry," he snapped. "Why am I working myself to death? Chiefly to salvage some of the wreckage. Brats people don't want and aren't fit to have. V.D. that just breaks your spirit for every case you treat there are five going about untreated, spreading it. G.P.I., locomotor ataxiamore wreckage. Nervous breakdowns, perversions more wreckage. Wouldn't you be angry-if you knew that you could teach people how not to have unwanted children, how to avoid disease—at about a millionth of the cost of treatment—if only it wasn't for the puritan attitude to these things? The puritans won't help. They just pray. And kick the poor wretches who are down. I salvage a bit of wreckage now and then, make a man or woman of it; but it's pretty hopeless really. We want a change of spirit in the world. Get depressed when I'm tired. Got plenty of money-wonder why I go on. Dam' sight easier to go to Church and pray!"

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He snorted angrily and increased his pace. Looking sideways at him, I thought that I had never seen so tired a man. This walking-tour must be balm to his weary spirit; and he would probably prefer to be alone. Therefore, when we came down to Pont Newydd, and he paused uncertainly on the English side of the bridge, I held out my hand and said goodbye. He grinned and looked at the bridge.

"Tom Tiddler's Ground!"

"So you're going to stay in England?" I said.

"Aye. Not one step across the Border. A bloody country full of bloody people. I'm going on up North."

"Let's meet again!" I cried suddenly. "I'll come back into England on purpose to see you! How about Oswestry in Shropshire? Seven days' time?"

"That's good going," he said.

"We can cadge lifts now and then. We needn't walk all the way."

"All right." He nodded. "Thursday morning at Craven Arms. Meet at the pub?"

"In the bar, at half-past ten."

"Right. Au revoir!" He smiled and strode off. I watched him go down the road: a very tall figure, with rather hunched shoulders, and with a sort of faintly sardonic defiance even in his walk. He wore a battered plus-four suit, greenish and beautifully old, and he had no hat. His coat pockets bulged—pyjama trousers and Religio Medici on the left hand side, pyjama jacket and Urn Burial on the right. So he went on his way, with none but Sir Thomas Browne for company; good company, too, for as I crossed

Pont Newydd into Brecknockshire I found myself saying aloud the opening sentences of that piece of most astonishing prose which the curious doctor carried in his pocket. "When the funeral pyre was out, and the last valediction over..." Thus strangely, suiting my step to the rhythm, I walked into Wales.

Close to the Border, on the Brecknockshire side, I came upon a little inn where I made my lunch of bread and cheese. Had the doctor crossed the March with me, I could have shown him open doors on a Sunday. . . .

When I was refreshed, I went on up the valley beside a pleasant, swift stream, the Grwyne Fechan. The tall mountain called Pen Cerig-Calch rose on my left hand; but the road wound with the river, through coppices and plantations of conifers, until it reached a solitary house called the Hermitage. Thence it climbed steeply towards the immense brown loneliness that lies between Mynydd Llysiau and Pen-y-Gader Fawr. This cwm was as barren and desolate as a Scottish corrie. Dead bracken and dead heather made it blackish-brown. The tops on each side of it were still flecked with snow. There was no living thing in it but myself and the crows and one old, scraggy ewe, that grazed close to the snow-line.

This solitary ewe—surely there is nothing in the world more lonely-looking than a single sheep on a mountainside—seemed by her presence to increase the awful loneliness of the great valley. She was wary, misanthropic, and probably half-mad. Her head went up when she winded me and she stood still

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for a moment, sniffing the breeze, while I crouched down on the steep path beneath her. I have a great hatred of these old mountain sheep, because they have more than once spoiled my stalking in the North. The weary battered head goes up, the keen nostrils dilate, the sheep shambles off down the corrie; a second later the deer, who have been watching their strange sentinel peacefully grazing, have got their noses in the wind also; and the ghillie says quietly: "They're awa'," and puts the rifle back in its case. . . . Therefore, I hate the wild, weird, ownerless sheep, renegades who belong to no flock and are counted by no crofter, but who wander in their Highland wilderness like mad saints—ovine Simeons and John the Baptists.

Nevertheless, as I sat watching this old ewe while she lifted her head and restlessly tossed it, I could not help admiring and respecting her. Physically she was a ruin; but she was a magnificent ruin. Her great head was borne on a long thin neck; her shoulders were narrow, her legs were sticks, her feet were swollen and rotten; her ribs, curved sharply, showed clearly through the skin. But her wool, still wet with the dew, was the colour of lichen on an apple-tree and reminded me of Francis Meynell's line:

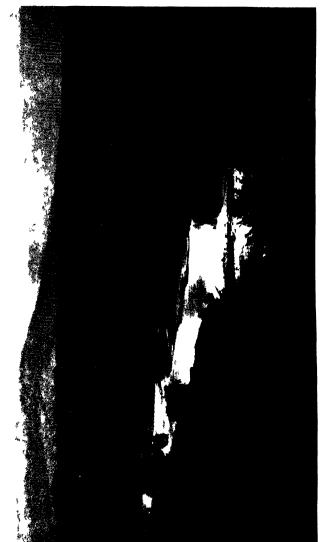
"Old sheep a silver glory share,"

while her terrible blurred eyes were still wary and defiant. At the last, those eyes would stare undaunted into the sky whence would come the final indignity—the black scavengers who would pluck them out.

Sheep in a flock are silly things; but these lonely ones, these mystics among sheep, these wretched, emaciated, forlorn bags of bones that have chosen the high tops for their homes and the barren hillside for their grave, have somehow lost their silliness and become terribly wise. They have gained freedomat a price. For they are no longer bought nor sold; no man holds dominion over them; they will never again be herded bleating into market nor chivied singly into the slaughterhouse. In autumn, no hasty, impetuous ram will trouble them; in spring, they will not become big-bellied nor know the pain of yeaning in the snowstorms. They are free, and for a little while they may do what they will among the heather and the bracken. They see the stags fighting for the hinds, hear the cock grouse arrogantly cry "Go back! Go back!" from the hillside, and for weeks, for months at a time they scent no hated human-being. Perhaps, within their ovine limitations, they seek Truth and Wisdom by withdrawing from the world; they are the Anchorites among their kind.

But their freedom is short-lived. When their feet rot, there is no crofter to heal them with creosote; when the flies sting in summer, no farmer's boy comes to pluck the maggots from their skin. Moreover, the pasture on the tops is poor and scanty; there is more peat-moss and bracken than wholesome grass. And so soon they die, and perhaps they find peace at last, who have so restlessly sought it. Their white ribs and scattered vertebræ remain unburied, shining in the sun....

Before long this old ewe saw me. She gave me one



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unfriendly stare and then, with infinite weariness, began to hobble away towards the snow. She held up her head bravely, but I could tell that she was sick, that she was near to the end of her searching for pasture and peace. Once she went down upon her knees, but she painfully rose again and staggered on. Her lichen-coloured coat became grey against the snow; and I noticed that, high in the air and eternally watchful, the black crows followed her.

It was now about half-past three. I was hot, tired, and thirsty, and I was already cursing the seductive cone of the Sugar Loaf which had lured me away from my path in the morning. I drank half a hatful of peaty water from a burn and toiled on up the pass.

Because of that which follows, and because the Law looks backwards, I must not too closely identify the rest of my route to Talgarth. I came to the top of the pass and saw below me a valley wherein were many small coppices and through which a swift stream ran northwards towards the Wye. Then I went down a steep lane which was full of red mud and four-foot snowdrifts. The snowdrifts were crisp and hard, and reddish-brown on the surface; they had lain there since the great blizzard, a fortnight ago. I climbed over them laboriously, up and down for about half a mile. Then I came out upon a main road and walked along it. There were seven empty cars drawn up beside this road, and soon, seeking the reason for their presence, I perceived a wayside inn. "Doubtless," I thought in my innocence, "the owners of these cars are at tea," and the prospect of

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tea was very pleasing. So I entered the inn by its open front door and heard a loud chatter coming from a room on the right. Now I was in Wales, and the hour was four o'clock; a time of day when the sale of 'alcoholic liquor' is prohibited by law throughout the British Isles. Furthermore, it was Sunday, and during the whole of Sunday, in Wales, no licensed premises are allowed to open at all. And yet the room from which the noisy chatter came had the words 'Saloon Bar' marked plainly upon its door!

I went in, and found a number of men cheerfully drinking pints of beer. The landlord looked at me inquiringly.

"I should like——" I began, and hesitated. Had that room been full of tea-drinkers, I should have whispered furtively 'A pint of beer' and drunk it with clandestine delight in the back room; but now the purchase of beer seemed altogether too easy and I discovered, to my astonishment, that I did not really want beer. It was the wrong time of day for it; so I changed my mind. "I should like," I said, "a nice cup of tea."

A gasp of surprise went round the room; and the landlord put down the mug which he had been wiping in readiness for my order, and amazedly gaped at me.

DIGRESSION (3)

ON DRINKING ON SUNDAY, AND AT OTHER TIMES

I DRANK my tea in the back room, which was chilly and cheerless, for it had no fire. I had been hustled away from the beer-drinkers lest I might prove to be some dangerous sort of teetotaller, and here I was, carefully segregated, in a fireless and dingy parlour whose peeling wallpaper had the most horrible pattern I had ever seen. It was the kind of room into which one is usually ushered for the purpose of drinking after hours; and as I sipped my tea I thought that here was a queer paradox indeed. Three paradoxes.—In Wales it is forbidden to drink on Sunday and yet the country inns serve drink as freely and shamelessly as speakeasies in Chicago; a thirsty wanderer, whose thoughts have been concerned with pints of beer for the last two hours, finds the beer so easy to obtain that he promptly orders tea instead; and, drinking his tea, he feels almost as guilty and furtive as if he were breaking the law!

Silly, no doubt; but surely the licensing laws are silly, too. We have become used to them, and we are inclined to take them for granted; and we do not realise how fantastic they seem to a foreigner. Once I tried to explain to a Frenchman, who had never been

to England, the system by which we control the sale of beer, wines, and spirits. I told him that in the country one might (in some places) buy a drink at 10 o'clock in the morning, but not at 9.59; in other places at 10.30 but not at 10.29; in others at 11 but not at 10.59; and so on. I told him that in London, whereas in some districts it was illegal to buy a drink at one minute past ten in the evening, in others, a few hundred yards away, one might legally drink until 10.30. I added that the purchase of a sandwich, of whatever antiquity, and whether edible or not, entitled one to continue drinking until 11 or 11.30; that in Scotland, on Sunday, it was necessary to prove that one was a bona-fide traveller before one might have a drink at all; and that in Wales it was illegal to purchase a drink on that day at any time or in any circumstances.

I gave him also a summary of our laws relating to the playing of billiards and singing and dancing on licensed premises; and I told him some of the regulations governing the hours of sale of such commodities as candles and cigarettes. When I had finished, he smiled and shrugged his shoulders as only his own race can. "Monsieur," he said, "I have travelled recently in French Guinea. I have noticed similar taboos among the natives there. The ways of uncivilised peoples are very amusing."

He was a cultured Frenchman, and that is probaby the most civilised thing in the world. His nation, which is politically so dangerous and economically so barbaric, has perfected itself in the art of living, and is probably twice as civilised as we are, and thrice as

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civilised as America. But he was a gentleman, this Parisian, and he had no intention of being rude.

"You and I," he said, "we are intelligent men; we stand outside these things. But are they not nevertheless a little comic and a little sad?"

More than a little comic and more than a little sad; for although the immediate results of these laws are comparatively trivial—being no more than the driving away of a few foreign visitors, the irritating of a few intelligent people, and the causation of a rather unpleasant sort of drunkenness on Saturday nightstheir ultimate effects are surely very grave indeed; for this wanton law-making, and our humble submission to it, seems somehow to debauch our minds. It changes our attitude towards life and gives us a false morality. For example, we have come to look upon drunkenness rather as a social sin than as an æsthetic faux pas. The civilised Southerner, seeing a drunken man staggering down the street, sick and soused like our Saturday-night Welshmen, would not say "How wicked!" He would say "How ugly!"; and there, I think, is the secret of the art of living, which he has found and which we have lost. He does not say: "That drunken man is a menace to the State; we must prevent him from getting drunk again." He says: "That poor fellow is not a very pretty sight, is he? He is a very offensive sight, staggering down the street in the sunshine. It is a shame that he does not appreciate good wine and does not know how to enjoy himself." So also, if a man is notoriously promiscuous, your Southerner does not think: "What an evil creature! He is a social danger, and

must be given fewer opportunities for promiscuity." Instead he thinks: "What a pity that so-and-so sleeps with so many different women! He will dull his wits and lose the keen edge of enjoyment. He is a boor, and does not know anything about love."

There are the two attitudes diametrically opposed. The first is a mixture of Prussian and Communist state-worship with the English and American ideal of legalised interference with individual liberty on humanitarian and sentimental grounds, excused by the plea that the interference is undertaken in the best interests of the person interfered with; the second is the sensible, lazy, Latin way of thinking, which regards these matters rather from the æsthetic than the moral standpoint. It is easy enough to see which is the outlook of the slave and which is the outlook of the cultured freeman.

As for us, in spite of Rule Britannia! we are well on the way to being slaves already. We have ceased to regard it as a colossal presumption that our rulers should dictate to us at what hours and seasons we may drink a glass of beer. A colossal presumption it is, for it takes away from us a right which, in Athens and Rome, was in fact possessed by slaves; and yet we calmly accept it, we genuflect to our strange new god which is called the State, and sigh faintly, and go about our affairs.

As an example of how servile we have become, I must quote from a letter which appeared in one of the weekly reviews and criticised a certain paragraph in my book *Tramping Through Wales*. In this paragraph I described how I reached Colwyn Bay on a

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Sunday and sought a drink in vain, so that I became very angry with Colwyn Bay for treating its visitors in such an inhospitable manner. My critic, in his letter, accused me of being "not much of an adventurer" because I did not disregard the law and obtain a drink by cunning or bribery. He suggested that if I had gone the right way about it I could have had my beer, and need not have written hard things about Colwyn Bay, which hard sayings, he complained, might discourage people from visiting Colwyn Bay and interfere with its trade.

Now the tragic thing about that letter (which was typical of many of the criticisms I received on the same subject) is simply this: that it admits the stupidity of the law and yet accepts the law as a painful necessity—as something, at any rate, which it is too much bother to get rid of. It says, in effect: "Get round the law on the quiet if you can do so without being caught; but for goodness' sake do not cause a lot of bother by criticising the law." I was "not much of an adventurer" because I refused to creep round back doors and bribe landlords and wink at policemen; because, in fact, I refused to behave like a criminal and chose to make fun of the law-makers instead. My critic coolly admitted the necessity of "being adventurous" in order to get a glass of beer on Sunday; and he did not seem to think that there was anything very odd about that necessity, nor did he suggest that the matter might be remedied. He was thinking crooked, and that, I believe, is the most disquieting result of this particular form of bureaucracy.

Apart from feeling a little temporary irritation when he is refused one, the average man does not really care tuppence whether he has a drink on Sunday or not; but unfortunately the effects of Welsh prohibition do not end there. Once we admit that the prohibitionists and the 'Temperance' Societies have a right to interfere with one jot of our liberty, then we are slaves not only in this matter but in everything. (Incidentally, I have often wondered why nobody has thought of prohibiting the sale of tinned foods, which I understand are far more poisonous than most forms of alcohol, and which in America are consumed in increasing quantities every year.)

Our trouble is that we have ceased to question the laws that govern us; we accept them as necessities without considering whether they are good or bad. Who was it who said "Make as few laws as possible, but let them be good ones, and let them be obeyed"? We have forgotten that wise instruction. We make too many laws, and most of them are bad ones, and few of them are generally obeyed. Such a course is bound to lead in the end to one of two great evils: complete servility and State-worship, under Communism or a dictator, or complete lawlessness, and the rule of the gangster with his gun.

CHAPTER FOUR

TALGARTH AND HAY

I CAME upon Talgarth at dusk. In the lane the pipistrelles were out, and I could hear their shrill slate-pencil squealing as they hunted flies. A few owls were calling from the coppices, and the starlings were noisily going to bed in the holly-trees.

The evening was warm and still; and when I left the lane and came into a street, there was no sound at all but the tramp of my nail-shod shoes upon the pavement. Talgarth was asleep, or at Chapel. was the quietest little town I had ever known; but as I walked through it I was suddenly aware of a whisper that grew louder and became a song. At last I stood upon a bridge and listened to the murmur of the little river which perpetually sings Talgarth to sleep. This little river has no name; or perhaps it has a secret name by which the people of Talgarth know it, but upon the ordnance map it is anonymous—it is no more than a very faint blue line which at Talgarth divides into two, and these two go wandering away to the south-west, and are lost somewhere in the hills. Below Talgarth, it joins the Afon Llynfi, which in its turn runs north to Glasbury and the Wye. And that

is all I can tell you of Talgarth's little river that has not a name.

Because of this small stream, Talgarth is never quite silent, and yet is always, I think, asleep. If one day the stream ceased to flow, then Talgarth would wake up and wonder what was the matter; the unfamiliar silence would seem like a mighty noise, interrupting the town's slumber. Meanwhile, the stream holds Talgarth in enchantment, for its music is like that of a damsel with a dulcimer.

Stand on the bridge at Talgarth, and close your eyes, and you may imagine that you are in some fragrant Persian garden through which the Caliph has caused a stream to flow for the delight of his ears and the delectation of his eyes when he walks with the veiled ladies of the harem at evening. And he has beheaded his Court Poet (you will think) because the wretch's jog-trot metres were so unlovely compared with the sweet, quiet song of the little stream!

Early next morning, I hastened away from Talgarth lest I be enchanted like the inhabitants of the place; lest I be sung to sleep never to waken! In the bright sunshine of another beautiful day I walked towards the River Wye.

I was indeed lucky as far as the weather was concerned. I have walked in May, in June, in July, and in August, but I have never encountered such soft, sweet weather as I found this March. I am not at all sure that March is not the best month of the whole year in which to make a walking-tour. It is just as likely to be dry and sunny as any other season

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except September; it is never too hot; and the country-side in March has that thrilling, faintly-green expectancy which is the sign of Persephone's first stirring. In other months the woods and hedges may be lovelier; for there are no flowers now except the humble celandines and primroses, and perhaps the little strawberry-leaved potentilla on the hedge-banks; yet at no other time do you have the same subtle and exciting feeling, that the countryside stands as it were on the threshold of great adventures. Tremendous things are happening, but they are happening invisibly—within the sombre trunks of the tall woodland trees, and underground in the glade where the bluebells will blossom in May.

Besides, there is one delight which belongs only to the spring; you will never know it if you take your holidays in June or the late summer. The songs of the birds will keep you company as you walk down the bare brown lanes, and from the ploughed field which is faintly pricked with wheat the lark will go up like a rocket whose flame is music. After mid-June, all these voices will be still; and you will have none but the cuckoo (hoarse and hesitant already) to entertain you as you go down the valleys.

There is one more reason why I like walking in March, and that is a personal and misanthropic one. The bands of hikers, swarming along the roads like herds of kine going to market, do not appear so early in the spring; and for my part I am grateful for their absence. And those curious hermaphordites—neither one thing nor the other—who call themselves 'bike-hikers' (My God!) are absent also, and cannot

embarrassingly claim kinship with me as they are wont to do, waving an arm and saying "Hello," as if to imply that I, too, am a hiker, and one of their tribe. Their good-fellowship is so aggressive that there is no escape from it; unless I wish to be a boor I must acknowledge their greeting and admit the kinship. And this I have no desire to do, because I hate their tearing bicycles and their great grinning sweaty faces, and I hate the clothes they wear and their slip-shod, casual methods of camping and their horrible hearty condescension towards their betters in village inns. In fact, I hate everything about them, and I even unchivalrously dislike their womenfolk, whose behinds are always too big for their shorts, or whose shorts are always too small for their behinds.

The road from Talgarth to Hay goes through a countryside of little hills. Instead of the whistling of the curlews, I heard everywhere the sad, wild cry of the aerobatic peewits, who were tumbling and somersaulting in the air above their nests. The hedges were bright with the golden catkins of the sallow, all a-buzz with bees. (When dusk came, the bacchanal moths would be about them, brown and grey and terra-cotta, as silent as ghosts, as swift and soft-winged as angels; and one by one they would settle on the sweet blossoms and drink till they were tipsy.)

I walked very leisurely. Once I paused for half an hour, sitting on a stone bridge over a stream and watching a pair of jolly white-dickied dippers catching



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flies among the stones. At the Three Cocks Inn I drank a glass of beer; and at Glasbury I leaned over another bridge, looking for salmon in the Wye. In the early afternoon I came to Hay.

In Hay it seemed always afternoon. I saw the place at night, and again before I left it next morning, and at all times its old streets had the drowsy air of early afternoon. Next to Talgarth (and Talgarth is enchanted like the Princess in the fairy-tale) Hay is the sleepiest place I know.

I had some bread-and-cheese at one of its quiet inns, where the talk was all of salmon—how Mr. So-and-so had taken a nineteen-pounder yesterday, and Lord So-and-so had caught a thirty-pounder the day before. The bar was full of men who knew the Wye; and one very old bearded fellow (who seemed to be a professional boatman) suddenly turned to me and said: "There's more fish in the Wye than salmon, and some mighty queer ones." Then he brought out from his pocket a crumpled photograph. "That was caught in the Wye here last winter. You can't tell me what sort of fish that is!"

I stared hard at the photograph, which represented—of all the unlikely creatures—a moribund Duck-billed Platypus held at arm's length by its proud captor.

"It isn't a fish," I said. "It's an animal. It lives in Australia, it burrows in the ground, and it lays eggs. It certainly isn't found in the Wye."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the landlord, interrupting.
"But there you are wrong. The thing may be an animal as you say, and it may come from Australia,

and for all I know it may lay eggs, though that's a bit thick, and I suppose you'll be telling us next that it's a bird. But it was caught in the Wye, that I can vouch for, because I saw it myself. Perhaps it had escaped from a zoo; but I tell you, sir, there're some queer things in the river that nobody knows of."

I stood corrected. Ex Hay semper aliquid novi. If a crocodile takes my salmon fly next time I go a-fishing I shall not be at all surprised; such a creature would be commonplace compared with a Duckbilled Platypus.

After lunch I shook off the lethargy with which Hay had already clothed me and walked four miles to Clock Mill in order to pay a call on Mr. Rafael Sabatini. I found him wading waist-deep in the river, spinning for salmon. I sat on the bank for half an hour and watched his straight line swing beautifully across the pool, the spinner drop neatly under the far bank, the rod-point come round slowly as the line was recovered. I concentrated all my attention on that rod-point, hoping to see it dip suddenly and curve and to hear the reel screaming. Occasionally, from my station on the high bank, I saw a splash and a boil in the water, or the silver flash of a head-andtail rise; then I would call excitedly: "Fish, at the edge of the stream" or "Fish, half way down the pool under the far bank," and Mr. Sabatini would nod. But the salmon were scornful, and would have nothing to do with the bright minnow. At last Mr. Sabatini came out of the water and took me back to Clock Mill

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to tea; and until six o'clock we talked, not of our common trade of words, but of flies and rods and rivers, and the queer habits of fish.

DIGRESSION (4)

COMIC INTERLUDE

I WALKED back towards Hay beneath the stars; and it appeared that there had been a big farm sale in the district, for I was continually meeting carts and wagons loaded with pigs and sheep and agricultural implements. It appeared also that there had been something in the nature of a bar close to the place where the sale was held; for nearly all the farmers and drovers were considerably tipsy, and they sang and shouted and waved their whips as they merrily went home.

When I was about half-way to Hay I saw a pony and float coming unsteadily towards me. The pony was cantering, the reins were dragging on the ground, and the float was yawing like a badly-sailed yacht—swinging to and fro across the road. No driver stood up in it, and no drunken voice sang throatily to the stars. Apparently the owner of this one had fallen off.

Now I was very tired, and the notion suddenly came to me that I might at the same time do a good turn and get a lift back to Hay. Therefore I stepped into the middle of the road and seized the pony by the cheek-strap as it cantered past me. The pony obligingly stopped and stood quite still while I patted

COMIC INTERLUDE

it and recovered the broken reins. I knotted them together, turned the pony's head in the direction of Hay, and climbed up on to the float. I did not bother to get inside it, but sat on the front, with my feet against the shafts. The float seemed to be empty but for a few big sacks.

I told the pony to 'gee-up' and he began rather reluctantly to trot back towards Hay. I sat on the front of the float, and swung my legs, and enjoyed the unfamiliar jolting. I felt very proud of myself. I had stopped a runaway horse and was about to deliver it, safe and sound, to the police-station at Hay; and incidentally I was saving myself two miles of walking.

The pony trotted along sombrely, head down and ears flecked back. Not a very smart turn-out, I thought; but what could one expect of a farmer who got so drunk that he fell out of his float on to the road? I kept my eye open for a figure lying in the ditch. If I could find the farmer as well, and take him to hospital, I should complete my bag, as it were, and feel still more conceited.

The road was very lonely now; the stream of carts and wagons flowed no more, and there was not a soul in sight. The cloppety-clop of the pony's hoofs, and the jolt and rattle of the float, were the only sounds save the owls' hooting. I was about half a mile from Hay.

And then suddenly I heard another sound which very nearly caused me to fall off the float with fright and astonishment. It came from immediately behind me, and it was the sound of singing. A ghost had apparently perched itself on my shoulder and burst

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into song; but the song was hoarse and unspiritual and was interspersed with hiccups. "When I was quite a little boy," sang the ghost, terrifyingly close to me,—

"When I was quite a little boy
My mother always told me,
That if I didn't kiss the girls
My lips would all go mouldy..."

"Here, whoa!" I said to the pony, and the pony whoa'd. I tremblingly looked over my shoulder into the bottom of the float. It was very dark, but the sacks were indubitably stirring. And the sacks continued to sing:

"King Louis was a king of France, Before the Revolution.... Haul away, Joe! Haul away, Joe! King Louis had his head cut off, Which spoiled his Constitution, Haul away, Joe!"

"Good God!" I said. I leaned down and touched the sacks. I seized something hairy and pulled. It seemed to be a moustache. A voice said: "Here, be I whum yet? Who's that? Lemme go!"

After a loud hiccup, the voice went on, complaining: "Is that Martha? Lemme 'lone, Martha. No call for a man's wife to pull him about just because he's had a few drinks.... Be qui' all ri' in a minute. Met a few friends at shale. Lemme 'lone."

COMIC INTERLUDE

There was an enormous chuckle inside me, a monstrous bubble of laughter which was rising into my throat and would soon burst. I held down the bubble, which furiously fought to be free, while I tied the reins to the front of the float and turned the pony's head away from Hay again. Then I said "Gee-up!" and the pony broke into a canter. The float rattled and swung from side to side. From the bottom of the float a voice resumed its singing:

"When I was quite a little boy
My mother always told me..."

My bubble of laughter refused to be suppressed any longer. I sat down at the side of the road and quietly gurgled until the bubble was gone. Then I walked slowly towards Hay. Far away now, a voice sang tipsily:

"... That if I didn't kiss the girls, My lips 'd all go mouldy ..."

Then the voice died away; and there was a deep silence under the stars, until I began to laugh again.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SHEEP COUNTRY

I TRAVELLED from Hay to Kington in the most disreputable company. I had met the two hucksters during the previous evening, in a pub at Hay, and they had mentioned that they were going next day to Kington Market. Now the country between Hay and Kington is rather dull and flat, and I had no particular desire to walk through it. Besides, I should have to get a lift or two sooner or later, in order to keep my tryst with the doctor at Oswestry in four days time. Therefore, I paid for several successive rounds of drinks and eventually extracted from the two hucksters a promise that they would call for me at nine nine o'clock next morning and take me to Kington.

They duly turned up in a ramshackle lorry and honked furiously outside my hotel. I squeezed myself in between them, in the front of the lorry, and off we went.

They were without exception the most nauseous pair I have ever come across. One was very short and one was very tall. The short one was unwashed, unshaven, and had a squint; the tall one had an unpleasantly bloated face and a long red scar on his forehead. They both possessed the horrible habit of



THE SHEEP COUNTRY

talking out of the corners of their mouths, without turning their heads to look at the person whom they addressed.

It seems ungrateful thus to describe them, since they were kind enough to give me a lift for which they asked no payment. And perhaps, after all, their faces were their misfortune, and their souls were exceedingly pu-ah. However, I am inclined to doubt it: for I have an old-fashioned notion that ugly people are generally bad people, and that the face is a fairly accurate mirror of the mind. Of course, by ugliness I do not merely mean irregularity of feature; and of course I know that ugliness is very difficult to define. Actually, I should say that an ugly face is a face which makes children afraid; for children, remember, are much more unprejudiced than grownups, they possess no store of experience from which to make false deductions, and they have to rely solely upon their instinctive perception of good and evil.

Now, in the children's picture books the villains are always ugly and the heroes are always handsome; and this differentiation is so astonishingly simple that it probably contains a great deal of truth. For my part, at any rate, I am content to abide by it; I mistrust and as far as possible avoid very ugly people and make my friends among nice-looking ones.

Therefore, I found it difficult to feel charitable towards these two hucksters or to believe that their souls were pu-ah; and so, tightly wedged between them, I kept my hands in my pockets all the way....

When we reached Kington I escaped from them as quickly as I could and wandered about the little

town. Already the streets were crowded with stock coming in to market. My principal impression of Kington is that of a loud and continual bleating. There were sheep everywhere, the flocks flowed through the streets like rivers which join with other rivers and grow big; the market place was a vast estuary of sheep.

They had been driven down, early that morning, from the little green hills which rise to the north; from Hergest Ridge and Hanter Hill to the west; from the border wilderness which lies between the Arrow watershed and the river Edw; and from the great Radnor Forest in the north-west. Now all these flocks were joined in a bleating, baa-ing flood which flowed, dirty-white and reddish-brown, through the narrow streets of Kington. The clever, quick-witted collies were almost drowned in the flood, and had to run along the backs of the sheep in order to keep the flocks separate: blue-marked from redspotted, green-crossed from yellow-starred.

The drovers, waving their arms and yelling unnecessarily, as drovers always do, had descended upon Kington also, like a gathering of Border tribesmen: little short-legged men, hard from walking the mountains, and weathered by the storms. A fort-night ago, after the great blizzard, some of these men had spent three or four nights in succession high up in the Forest, digging out their sheep from the snow. Theirs was a lonely life and a hard one, and this market day, with its noise of swearing and yelling, was a sort of oasis in the desert of their loneliness. They would be drunk to-night; but somehow they

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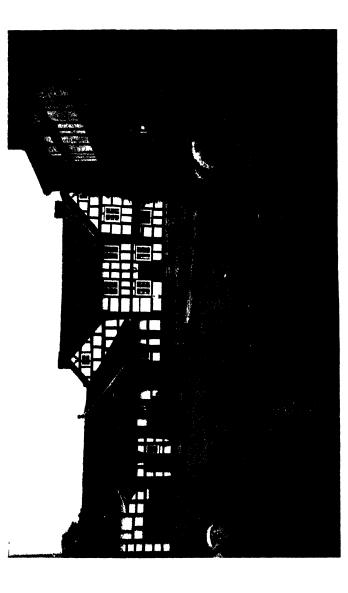
would get their sheep home, into the fastnesses of the hills.

I left Kington at mid-day and walked towards Leominster. I was fortunate in getting another lift which took me more than half of the way. This time my benefactor was a nice fat man who drove a fast car and sold typewriters.

I was now in the valley of the Arrow; I was going away from the hills. This was a dairy country, with lush green water meadows like those through which the Test flows in Hampshire. The villages here were very old and beautiful, composed of crooked streets and half-timbered houses. Such sweet, dreamy places were Pembridge and Eardisland, between Kington and Leominster, and Eardisley, which I had passed through in the hucksters' lorry on the way from Hay. Perhaps Leominster itself was such a village once; it is full of good half-timbered architecture, but it has grown, as it were, about this central core, and straightened and widened its streets, and turned the sleepy faces of its old houses into very wide-awake shop-fronts.

In the afternoon I went on towards Ludlow; and yet a third time I was lucky enough to get a lift. I had reached a place called Richards Castle, and it was six o'clock, so I was having a drink at the inn. Richards Castle is a village that is cut in two by the county boundary. Here, at the inn, I was still in Herefordshire; Shropshire began at the bottom of the village street, a few hundred yards away.

As I was finishing my beer, a lorry drew up outside the inn. It was full of sheep, packed so tightly that they might have been bales of wool but for the pitiful bleating that came from them. A man got out of the lorry and came into the bar; I stood him a drink, and he promptly offered me a lift into Ludlow. He was a dealer in sheep, and from long association with these animals he had come to bear a close resemblance to one of them. He had a woolly appearance and vacuous eyes beneath bushy eyebrows, a pointed face, and a rather small pursed mouth. He talked in a high, complaining voice, so that he seemed always to be bleating.



DIGRESSION (5)

ON DEALERS AND THE BEASTS WHICH THEY RESEMBLE

IT IS a most curious but indisputable fact, that men grow to resemble the beasts they deal in. This fantastic truth may be proved by observation; go to a stock market and see for yourself. Everybody knows the horsey look of a horse-dealer; and what is true of him is true also of other men who trade in living creatures. You will find at the market large, bovine men, meeker, bleating, sheep-like men (such as the one who gave me a lift to Ludlow), horrible, beadyeyed, snouty, pig-like men, and even little pert, chirpy men who deal in fowls. Certainly, I have never seen a man who bought and sold guinea-pigs or gold-fish, but I expect the same thing would apply to him also.

There is another truth about dealers: they are exceedingly nasty. Doubtless there are dealers who are upright men, devoted husbands and good fathers and worthy citizens; but the majority of dealers possess none of these virtues, and are unmitigatedly horrible. They cringe to those from whom they expect profit and they bully those from whom they can hope for none. Whenever possible, they cheat the farmers, the auctioneers, their own customers, and

even each other—since they are entirely lacking in that honour which is supposed to exist among other kinds of thieves. They have little or no sensibility, and are usually cruel. They are often sodden with drink, they are exceedingly foul-mouthed, and they have no manners.

I know this because at one time my work lay among them. It was my misfortune to be cringed to by them, bullied by them, sworn at, cheated, and insulted by them. On two occasions it was my pleasure to hit one of them very hard on the jaw. In fact, I know all about dealers: and I know most of the tricks of their parasitic trade.

I suppose their beastliness actually comes from their close connexion with the beasts; for it is certainly true that people who have a great deal to do with animals—that is, with one particular sort of animal, not necessarily with animals in general—are somehow brutalised and degraded by the association. They become, not the equals of the animals, but the inferiors; not as willing and stout-hearted as horses, not as faithful and trusting as dogs-alas, if they became the equals of these beasts they would gain in virtue! We should not complain if they grew to be like good animals; but instead they merely degenerate into bad men. Who would not rather trust a horse than a horse-dealer? What decent man would not prefer the company of a good dog to that of one of those loathsome women who frequent dog-shows?

It is very strange that horses and dogs—the nicest animals—should have this disastrous effect upon the men and women who have most to do with them. ON DEALERS, AND BEASTS THEY RESEMBLE

Consider the hangers-on of the horse: horse-dealers, trainers, jockeys, tipsters, touts, bookmakers, professional punters. Consider also the hangers-on of the dog: breeders, dog-show women, greyhound racers, and so on. What a nasty crowd they are! How dishonest, how petty, how greedy, how full of little mean tricks!

It is very instructive to go to a flat-race meeting and watch the people on the stand during a close Below, a dozen gallant horses are nearly bursting their hearts and lungs in the last desperate sprint to the winning-post. Here in the stand the bookies and punters are frantic with excitement because they may win or lose a few pounds; tipsters are sneaking away lest they shall shortly be confronted by the angry purchasers of their worthless tips; owners and trainers are less often anxious that their horses shall win than anxious that their horses shall be made to lose—in order to deceive the bookmakers, the punters, and the other owners. What a very dirty business it is! . . . and down below the splendid horses thunder along that last straining halffurlong, with nostrils dilated and sweaty withers and foam-flecked mouths. . . .

Which are the Yahoos (one asks), and which the Houyhnhnms!

As I travelled towards Ludlow this afternoon, the dealer who sat in the driving seat of the lorry told me with satisfaction that he had bought his sheep cheaply to-day, because a certain small farmer had been hard-pressed for his rent. Knowing this, the dealer had

gone to him before the sale and offered him a price—cash down, just enough to pay his rent. . . . The farmer had taken it, because he could not afford to take the risk of getting less at the auction, or of having to buy in the sheep and take them home again. If he had waited, he'd have got an extra four shillings a head for them. The dealer was very proud, because he had thus smartly cheated the farmer.

So he bleated of his little triumphs; but the bleating at the back of the lorry had ceased now, and the close-packed sheep, with heaving sides and infinitely patient eyes, waited quietly for their terrible journey to end. They still had twenty miles to go when the dealer stopped to drop me at Ludlow; only another hour—unless their owner had a few drinks, and met a few friends, on the way. But they'd be lucky if he didn't, because he was so proud of his smartness in buying them cheap that he'd want to bleat about it to someone else before very long.

CHAPTER SIX

LUDLOW

OF COURSE, Ludlow is completely and absolutely lovely. If I had to choose one town in which to spend the rest of my life, I think my choice would be Ludlow; I do not know anywhere like it in the world.

The bright Teme runs through it and passes beneath one of the nicest bridges over which a lazy man ever leaned, staring into the water. Close at hand Titterstone and the Brown Clee rise steeply, asking to be climbed: hills which pretend to be mountains, and which somehow have the air and spirit of mountains, so that he who goes up to the top of them feels that he has achieved something more than the climbing of mere hills. On the other side of the town lies the long wooded ridge called Bringewood Chase, ending in Tatteridge Hill and Brandon Camp-more mountainy hillocks over which a climber may stretch his legs. Then there is Whitecliff Wood, which I have never explored, but which, on the map, is crowded with attractive names-Mary Knowl Valley, High Vinnalls, and Juniper Hill. There is the river Onny, which comes from the Longmynd, the river Corve, which comes from Wenlock Edge, and the river Clun, which performs astonishing acrobatics of twisting and

turning on its way to the Teme from its source, which seems to be at an inn on the Shropshire, Radnor, and Montgomery borders. (Surely Clun is the only river in the world which rises at an inn; but its spates—alas!—possess no significance beyond that of rain in the hills.)

As for Ludlow town itself, it is just quietly beautiful. It is a place in which one should wander about without hurrying and without consciously sightseeing. Those Tudor buildings should not, I think, be stared at, carefully examined, viewed from this angle and that; one should merely be aware of them, one should walk down Broad Street, King Street, and the Bull Ring during the drowsy, bee-filled quietude of a summer afternoon; for thus one discovers what England is, and why one loves it. And then one should have tea at the Feathers, which was an inn as long ago as the great day when the king came into his own again; and finally, at evening, one should see the castle. Not at close quarters, I think; leave that view to the meticulous archæologists, who are aware of stones at their feet but unconscious of the splendour above their heads, and see the castle from Temeside—from the long weir above Dinham Bridge. A castle should be looked at from below, for thus the besiegers looked at it and saw its impregnability, its rock-like stubbornness, its glory against the sky. To gaze out from watch-tower or turret is a smug, defensive way of seeing a castle. The walls fall sheer below one, moat or steep hillside guard the doors beneath, and one knows how safe the defenders felt in the days before howitzers and H.E. But go down below, and

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see those turrets reared black against the sunset or ghostly-grey against the stars. Then one knows the brave and undefeated spirit of the castle; one sees what the attackers saw.

Ludlow Castle has probably been the scene of more desperate fighting and of more exciting happenings than any other fortress of the Marches. Its builder, the knight Joce de Dinan, finished it early in the twelfth century, but was dispossessed of it at the beginning of the reign of Stephen by a rebel baron, Gervase Panagel. About 1150 Joce was back again; rather uncomfortably so, for he was practically a prisoner in his own castle, hemmed in by the men of Hugh de Mortimer. He dared not even go hunting or hawking in the neighbouring countryside, until one day he was lucky enough to ambush de Mortimer and make him prisoner. He kept him in the loftiest tower of the castle, and finally ransomed him for 3000 marks.

Next Joce went to war with Walter de Lacy over the question of the ownership of some Herefordshire estates. De Lacy stormed Ludlow Castle and was defeated after a great battle in the fields across the river. With one of his knights, Arnold de Lys, he was marched off to the castle and imprisoned in the tower known as Pendover.

Joce now seemed safe enough; he had subdued his troublesome neighbours, and when he went hunting or hawking he could give undivided attention to his falcons and his hounds. He was no longer likely to be ambushed, nor to find his castle in other hands when he returned to it.

One would think that he would now have the quiet enjoyment of his possessions, which he surely deserved after he had so strenuously defended them; but a new danger threatened, unknown to Joce—a danger born within his own castle walls. It took the form of a love-affair between one of the ladies of his household, Marion de la Bruere, and the prisoner in the tower, Arnold de Lys.

Marion de la Bruere was completely swept off her feet by this brave knight, she was a woman in loveand such women are dangerous. I suppose that there is nothing in the world, however dishonourable, which a woman in love would not do for her beloved. A man in like case would hesitate and quibble and torture himself with doubts; he would think of such things as loyalty and 'decency', which to a woman would appear entirely irrelevant. (For love is a wholetime job for her, never a sport or a diversion, as it is for many men; and her quick, unreasonable mind perceives instinctively that chivalrous abstractions have nothing whatever to do with love, which is an unchivalrous business anyhow). A woman will do the meanest and most despicable actions to win her lover or to keep him; she is not bound by man's moral code, and she is not troubled by reason—she simply acts, and she has achieved her purpose while a man is still trying to decide by painful sophistry, "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?" No woman could ever have written:

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much, Loved I not honour more."

because honour and love are not associated in a woman's mind.

At any rate, Marion de la Bruere was in love with Arnold de Lys, and she made no bones about helping him to escape. She lowered both him and de Lacy from a window, at the end of a rope, on a moonless night when the guard was unwatchful.

De Lacy lost no time in arming his men again. For the next few months he made Joce's life a misery by a series of erratic skirmishes, which at last became so frequent and troublesome that several neutral barons who lived in the district were forced to intervene. They told the warlike knights that if they didn't cease to make the Marches uninhabitable by their petulant and ridiculous dog-fight they would seize the lands and castles of both. Under this threat, the enemies stopped fighting and became apparently reconciled.

Joce, feeling that at last he could safely leave his castle in the care of a small guard, went off with his household to pay a visit in Berkshire. But Marion de la Bruere was still in love. . . .

She feigned illness and begged to be left behind. Then she wrote a letter to Arnold de Lys, asking him to come and see her. Arnold showed the letter to de Lacy, and they decided that their chance had come. So Arnold went to his tryst on a dark night and took a thousand men-at-arms with him. Marion had left a ladder suspended from a window, and Arnold climbed up it and went straight to her room. A few minutes later de Lacy's picked men climbed up that ladder too, and went silently about the castle, killing the

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guards as they slept. One can imagine Marion stirring beside her lover and wondering what was the reason for a sudden hoarse shout that seemed to die in the throat that made it.

"What was that, beloved?"

"Only one of the servants who dreams strange things and yells in his sleep. . . . Or perhaps it was an owl hooting on the castle wall. Do not trouble your head with night-sounds! Turn over, my love, and look me in the eyes. . . ."

And towards morning, perhaps, Marion thought that the castle was unnaturally quiet.

"They should be changing the guard now, beloved, and yet I have heard no tramp of feet in the courtyard or on the stairs. . . . Is all well, do you think?"

"How could anything be ill when you have your lover beside you, Marion? Let us sleep for a space, and let your heart be at rest."

But a little later Marion decided to see for herself whether all was well. She went out of her room while Arnold slept, and she saw what she saw. She came back and took up her lover's sword, and killed him before he had opened his eyes. Then she opened the casement and jumped from her chamber window on to the stones below. . . .

The castle had not yet seen the end of fighting and tremendous happenings. Joce and his son-in-law, Fulke Fitz-Warine, laid siege to de Lacy, but were defeated by a horde of Welsh irregulars to whom de Lacy had sent for help. Joce suffered the indignity of being imprisoned in his own castle, but was later released at the command of King Henry II. He never regained possession of Ludlow, for he died shortly after the birth of his grandson—another Fulke, whom King John eventually outlawed, and who for many years lived a Robin Hoodish life in the woods.

During John's reign, de Lacy rebelled and fled to Ireland, but was subsequently pardoned and allowed to return to Ludlow. Then came a long period of baronial risings and border strife, during which Ludlow was held chiefly by the de Mortimers. Next, Red Rose and White were at war, and the White Rose lost a few petals at Ludlow, when Sir Andrew Trollope, the Duke of York's Marshal, went over to the Lancastrians at the beginning of the battle. A little later, at Mortimer's Cross on the River Lugg, White Rose had its revenge.

Thereafter Ludlow Castle was the home of the first Prince of Wales and became a Royal Palace under Henry Tudor. Catharine of Aragon spent her honeymoon there with Prince Arthur. Some Royalists were besieged there by Parliament men during the Civil War. Milton wrote Comus while staying there, and the Masque was first performed in the Council Chamber in 1634. And Samuel Butler, in a room over the gateway, finished the first part of Hudibras.

But gradually the castle fell into decay. The Border wars were over, and there was no further use for such splendid fortifications. To-day only the broken glory

of stone remains. But there is an inscription on the castle gateway which reads thus:

Hominibus ingratis loqumini lapides.

DIGRESSION (6)

ON BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

I WAS so delighted with Ludlow that whenever I went into a shop or an hotel I handed out bouquets to the tradesmen and congratulated the people of Ludlow upon their beautiful town. To my surprise, they did not seem very pleased with the bouquets nor very proud of the fact that theirs was the loveliest place in all the Border. Instead, they replied in a deprecatory manner: "Oh well, sir, I suppose it's all right; but it's terribly quiet, you know. Little town wants waking up. That's the trouble—wants waking up."

I was rather alarmed at this sort of talk, because there are many kinds of awakenings, and some of them are not altogether pleasant. One may be awakened very efficiently, for instance, by means of a sharp crack over the head with a mallet. Ludlow may wake up one morning to find that it has been popularised; and popularity of that kind brings in its train noise, posters, jerry-building, desperate hurry, homicidal buses, petrol-pumps, and paper-hatted ladies singing in the streets.

"All men kill the thing they love," wrote Oscar Wilde; and perhaps it may be argued that I am one of

the potential murderers of Ludlow, since I am writing about it and trying to persuade crowds of people to visit it. Yet only a very greedy man, surely, would try to keep a beautiful thing to himself; and no one but a churl would wish to starve a place of its tourists in order to prevent it from being spoiled.

Nevertheless, we who love these old towns have good reason to be afraid. For these last ten years, all over England, Beauty has been fighting a losing battle with the Beast. We have seen the Beast stretch out his long claws and claim the secret sacred places one by one. We have seen the beauty of whole valleys sold to advertising companies for a few shillings a year. We have seen little quiet villages robbed of their sweetness by the jerry-builder and the garage-man. We have watched towns like Ludlow change into towns like Bognor Regis.

The Beast's way with Beauty is to rape her and then turn her into a harlot. Perhaps, if he slew her when he had done, it would not be so bad; that is the way of industry, which wipes out a hillside or a valley and leaves nothing but dust and ashes where once was loveliness. The new Beast is more subtle and far more horrible. We all know what a beauty-spot looks like when the Beast has completed his work upon it. It smiles a greedy, twisted smile, it has the appearance of a painted face, it becomes parasitic, battening on visitors. As it grows less and less attractive its visitors become fewer. It is forced to try to attract a new type of visitor, and so its blatancy increases, it makes its appeal now to the New Savages who travel about in hordes and to whom noise is necessary and anæsthetic.

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Eventually a certain saturation-point is reached; even these savages come no more, the place has lost its last vestige of beauty, and has become a hag. The Beast (whose other names are Greed and Stupidity) has finished its work and is ready to lay its hands upon another virgin. . . .

Now I believe that towns like Ludlow can resist the Beast if they want to. Stratford-on-Avon¹ has fought against it and won; so has Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds, and Tewkesbury in the vale. It is only necessary for the town to make up its mind firmly, to decide which kind of tourist-traffic it will cater for and have. Will it choose fleets of buses which vomit bevies of ladies in paper-hats into its streets; or will it be content with such pilgrims as come to visit it because it happens to be quiet and rather lovely?

Of course, to paper-hats qua paper-hats, nor even to ladies in paper-hats, there is no objection at all; and for my part I have no wish to turn into serious sight-seers the sort of people who are happier as noisy trippers. Indeed, I am not sure that I am not a bit of a tripper myself, save that I like wandering about alone. Chacun à son goût; and I hate grave-minded reformers who try to make other people's tastes conform with their own. Therefore I do not mind the paper-hatted ones singing songs in the streets nor waving Guinness bottles nor even bashing each other over the head. I merely wish that they would go and do it at Brighton or Blackpool or Margate or Rhyl. But I certainly do not want them to be

invited to places like Ludlow; and that, I am afraid, is what the energetic wakeners-up of Ludlow would like to do.

It is a bitter reflection that the trippers do not really like these places which they are instrumental in spoiling; they are plucking a flower they do not want. Or perhaps I should say, they do not like them until they are spoiled. Ludlow at present would bore them stiff, since they prefer a resort where they may sit on the merry-go-rounds until they are sick; but give them the chance to turn Ludlow into something half-faked and bogus—like Broadway—and to surround it with an amusement park where they may disport themselves when they are tired of gazing at charlatan antiquities, and then they will think that Ludlow is "very nice, thank you, and so romantic".

Therein lies the danger of this 'wakening-up'. For there are no half-measures about the Beast. Ludlow cannot adopt the attitude of the demi-vierge. It cannot say: "You can go so far but no farther;" for the Beast goes the whole hog every time. Likewise Ludlow cannot say to the Paper-hatted Lady who arrives in a char-à-banc: "We will ask you here sometimes, but you mustn't come when our other visitors are coming;" for next time the Paper-hatted Lady will not wait to be asked.

And in her train, as surely as autumn follows summer, comes the Beast. Little shops spring up everywhere, a mushroom crop of shanties and tin-huts; shops that do no dignified, honest trade, but for a brief, hectic season sell postcards and sugar-rock and all sorts of things in 'cheap lines'. With the shops

ON BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

come the cheap ugly houses which the shopkeepers have put up in a hurry. There is no order, no design, no planning; for whoever heard talk of design and planning during a gold-rush? There's no time for that. Buy a plot of land, dig up the buttercups, put up a roof of some sort to shelter you and a tin-hut to contain your wares, erect a couple of red petrol-pumps as well, and plaster every available square inch with monstrous notices in vulgar lettering; get permission to put up a few notice-boards on the roadside above and below your premises, make them as large and ugly as you can, and then you're ready for the visitors. But hurry, lest somebody else steal a march on you; make a loud noise, lest somebody else make a louder; be blatant, lest the motorist pass you by. Let your notice-boards have brazen voices!

Cheap shops, bungalows, notice-boards, advertisement hoardings, ill-designed garages, tea gardens, and cafés in wooden huts: these are the Marks of the Beast, and by these ye may know him. Let the people of Ludlow take warning, and think twice before they awaken their town from its enchanted sleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

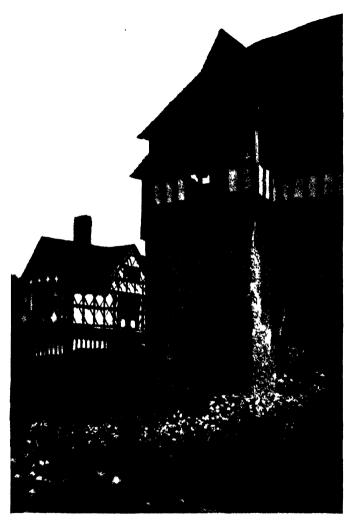
THE ROAD TO MONTGOMERY

I LEFT Ludlow at about nine o'clock on a cool, cloudy, windy day and went by bus to Craven Arms. There I stood at the cross-roads undecided. The right-hand road would take me to Wenlock Edge, nine little hills sprawled diagonally across the map like the scattered vertebræ of an ichthyosaurus. I could walk north-east, over the tops of those limestone hills, till I came down on Much Wenlock; then I could zig-zag nor'-west through Shrewsbury to Oswestry, where I had promised to meet the doctor in three days' time.

If, however, I went straight on from Craven Arms, I could go to Shrewsbury by way of Church Stretton and the Longmynd, or—bearing slightly left—direct to Oswestry across the dark and haunted loneliness of the Stiperstones.

And if I took the left-hand road, I could skirt the Clun Forest, get to Montgomery, and make a brief excursion into the little-known hills that lie behind it and beyond Llanfair Caerinion.

Having considered the matter for several minutes and come to no conclusion, I tossed a penny. I tossed



STOKESAY CASTLE, Nr. CRAVEN ARMS [Facing page 122]

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three times. First, heads for Wenlock Edge and tails for the Longmynd. Heads: the Longmynd was out of it. Secondly, heads the Stiperstones and tails Montgomery. Heads: Montgomery was out of it. Now the final between the Stiperstones and Wenlock. Wenlock won.

I put back the coin in my pocket, picked up my rucksack—and turned my face towards Montgomery!

There are people who will bind themselves with a toss as with a sacred vow. They have a superstitious fear of going against the decision of their penny. They believe that the Gods have spoken in answer to their plea for guidance, that 'heads' or 'tails' is Heaven's suggestion, nay, is Heaven's command. Moreover, they say reasonably: "Why toss at all if you do not intend to abide by it?"

Now my own view of the matter is that tossing a penny is a very good method of making sure of the way in which one's own inclinations lie. One has previously been undecided, unable to make up one's mind to a definite course of action. Shall I do this, or shall I do that? The penny says: "Do that," and at once one rebels against the dogmatism of the penny, one perceives more clearly than before the pitfalls which lie in the way of doing that, the boredom, the folly, the downright stupidity of doing that, and one discovers how much one has secretly desired to do this from the very beginning. "Why," one asks, "should this miserable penny dictate to me, an intelligent man, and tell me to do that when it is obviously wiser to do this? Good Heavens, shall I, who possess

a brain and the power of reason, allow my conduct to be ruled by chance? A thousand times, no! I will do this."

Thus the appeal to the gods is used as an aid to reason. One's self-respect is increased, and the gods are put in their place.

This morning they had spoken to me clearly enough. They had said twice: "Go to Wenlock Edge." But as soon as the penny fell I began to be aware of the many disadvantages of going to Wenlock Edge. I knew it already, whereas the Montgomery moorlands were unexplored. Furthermore, it was the obvious route of a tourist; it was guide-booky. But there was a pleasant feeling of independence about going to Montgomery, because I had never heard of anybody going to Montgomery nor even wanting to go there. I rebelled against the gods. "You think," (I said to Olympus) "that because I am writing a book about the Welsh Marches I should write about the places where tourists go. You think I should do the things that tourists do. In fact, you would like me to walk north-east with Precious Bane in one pocket and Mr. Housman's poems in the other. Well, I shan't. I shall go to Montgomery, and get a lift from there to Llanfair, and see if I can find a buzzard's nest on the tops of the moors!"

You notice (poor handcuffed reader) how little I consider you! Without a doubt, you are more interested in Mary Webb and A. E. Housman than you are in the eyries of buzzards and the croaking of ravens on the high hills. What a wretched guide am I, then, who has no regard at all for your preferences! . . .

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I think I must be direct with you at last. I am not your hired guide; I am a wanderer whom you may follow if you like, but whom you may not command. Say to me: "Take us to such-and-such a place," and I shall immediately walk off in the opposite direction. Let others lead you by the hand and show you round; as for me, please follow me for fun. I am a novelist on a holiday. I shall observe no duty towards my reader, for I am walking to please myself. I am not—I refuse to be—your guide!

So I took the left-hand road, whose sign-post pointed to Clun, and left the land of Mary Webb behind me. In any case, visiting her countryside, I should have been in the situation of a heretic making a pilgrimage, a schismatic at the shrine which belongs to the faithful. Let me make a confession. The Shropshire novels of Mary Webb are typical of a sort of literature which I can neither appreciate nor understand.

Mr. Housman's Shropshire Lad I whole-heartedly admire. Those terribly perfect lyrics (so unvaryingly perfect in technique that they make me despair of ever trying to write poetry again) are as sharp, as coolly bright, as keen-edged knives. They are utterly dispassionate, they are without the mixture of Godlike frenzy and anger and compassion which most great poems possess, and yet their lyric perfection makes up for all. In their world from which hope and passion and faith and pity are forever shut out and wherein both laughter and tears are bitter-sweet and taste the same, these poems shine like hard, cold stars

in an endless night. They do not blaze like beacons; for there is no news important enough to deserve a fire. They do not illumine the dark places; for their flame is no Promethean brand like Shelley's, and they do not seek to give knowledge to the world. Nor are they guiding-lights, showing the way to harbour; for there is no harbour, man is bound nowhither and will never arrive!

"O, never fear, man, naught's to dread, Look not left nor right: In all the endless road you tread There's nothing but the night."

So much for Mr. Housman. One may dislike his philosophy and his mood of being somehow beyond despair (for in his dark world there is no God to whom one may complain of the darkness) but at least one must admit that the sharp-edged perfection of his lyrics is the complete and concise expression of that philosophy. In his two small books, *The Shropshire Lad* and *Last Poems*, there is a total of 104 poems. Bearing in mind the rigid self-criticism implied by this economy, consider now the output of the Shropshire Lass. I suppose Mary Webb wrote about half a million words; and beside Mr. Housman's pointed clarity this bulk has the appearance of a great smudge.

Perhaps I am a Philistine; but I must confess that there is a certain style of writing—and Mary Webb's is typical of that style—of the beauties of which I am

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always exceedingly suspicious. It is a style in which there seems to be a lot of wild, weird poetry, a style in which elfin bugles seem to blow and which at a first reading appears somehow magical, as if it belonged to fairyland. Yet because I am a writer myself, and know that bluff is fairly easy in my trade, I am somewhat doubtful of the authenticity of that fairyland. I wonder whether those elfin bugles are not merely tin-trumpets after all.

It seems to me that clarity and economy are the two greatest virtues in writing-assuming, of course, that without imagination and creative power it is impossible to write at all. At any rate, clarity and economy are the two most difficult things to achieve. It is terribly easy to write pages and pages of musical prose which perhaps does not mean very much but which is full of whimsical and inaccurate references to flowers and birds and trees and has a few obscure country words dragged in to give it the appearance of authenticity and which, in the end, has the effect of very clever conjuring: it is sufficiently like true magic to take people in. But it is terribly, terribly hard to write a single paragraph in which there is not a word too much but which nevertheless expresses quite clearly and accurately and honestly one's meaning and one's thoughts; which is graceful in style without being affected; and which achieves its effect by the use of the right words honestly employed and not by the use of outlandish words dragged in because they 'sound well'.

Now I am a little suspicious of Mary Webb's style, and I cannot help comparing it unfavourably with,

say, the crystal clarity of Stevenson's or the blue ice that is Iane Austen's. But let us be charitable and assume that it is, as so many good critics have alleged, the prose of fairyland; assume that I am deaf to its music; and the awkward question still remains, What does it all mean? Surely a great writer must have something to tell us; the music of pan-pipes in the hills is all very well, but we at least expect the writer to interpret them for us. Now I have waded through the five finished novels of Mary Webb, the poems, and the short stories; and I can find no significance in them, no meaning, no philosophy, nothing that I can seize upon and declare: "This was Mary Webb"-except, perhaps, a fallacious belief in the benignancy of Nature and the tyranny of Man.

Moreover—this is a confession, not a criticism—the human characters in these stories seem to me so unbelievable that they almost make me laugh. They do not live, they surely cannot be real, and yet if they are symbols, of what are they symbolic? Of Good and Evil, perhaps? Of Tyranny and Innocence and Lust? If so, how very crude was Mary Webb's idea of Good and Evil—no half-tones, no shadowy borderland, just black and white!

And the men.... They have certain attributes of masculinity, they can rape women and propagate their kind, they possess bodies, but otherwise there is no evidence that these creatures of Mary Webb's imagination are men at all. How they can satisfy any male reader I cannot imagine; nor, for that matter, any intelligent woman other than a middle-aged

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virgin who has been segregated in a convent since the age of fifteen.

These are my own personal reactions to a reading of Mary Webb: I do not pretend that they are valid as criticism. Such men as Mr. Stanley Baldwin and Colonel John Buchan-both writers of excellent English prose themselves—have professed great admiration for her. I respect their opinions, but set down as mine that Mary Webb knew nothing about men and very little about nature, although she achieved a considerable effect in writing about things of which she was ignorant. She may or may not have been a poet; those flutes and trumpets of a twilight land (like the poetry of the Irish) have no appeal for me. I am a lover of clarity; and so, when I want to read the writings of a woman, I shall still turn to the books of Jane Austen, who was an intelligent woman in the best sense—which Mary Webb certainly was not-and who knew a great deal about men's minds, from her shrewd feminine point of view, whereas Marv Webb knew no more than certain legends about their bodies.

But enough; I am walking towards the Clun Forest, and my pockets bulge neither with *Precious Bane* nor *The Shropshire Lad*; I am not a literary tourist to-day, I am going to look for a buzzard in the hills....

The first village I came to, after leaving Craven Arms, was called Aston-on-Clun and was chiefly memorable because it had a large oak-tree on its village green, which tree was decorated with a great

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number of flags, mostly tattered Red Ensigns and Union Jacks. When I asked at a little shop the reason for this strange thing—thirty ragged flags tied to the branches of a single tree—I was told that it was an old custom, commemorating some local squire's birth or marriage or death (I forget which), and that the flags were taken down each year on oak-apple day.

I walked on beside the River Clun through a flat English landscape of woods and water-meadows. The rooks were busy in the elms, and over the fields the plovers were tumbling and wailing; but soon I heard the whistling of curlews as well, and then I knew that I was approaching the hills. I skirted the Clun Forest, begged a lift in a farmer's trap, and reached Bishop's Castle at mid-day. Bishop's Castle is the sort of place about which there is absolutely nothing to say. It possesses houses and a street, but no character at all. It is neither old nor new, pleasant nor unpleasant; it is merely . . . houses and a street! I passed through it quickly and took the road to Montgomery.

I shall never forget that road. It ran through a colourless and uninteresting countryside; it was straight, empty, and apparently interminable; its surface tired my feet.

I began to perceive now the great wisdom of the gods, who, when I tossed for their opinion, had caused my penny to fall tails-upwards for Wenlock Edge; who had so emphatically warned me against this project of going to Montgomery. As I toiled along this weary, endless, deserted road I clearly

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saw the folly of my young arrogance. O wise gods, why did I ask your advice and then scorn to take it! O revengeful gods, have you condemned me to tramp along this hellish road for ever, have you removed Montgomery with a thunderbolt so that there is nothing at the other end of this road, no inn, no bed, no supper, no beer? O just and compassionate gods, have pity upon my feet!

What a road! It ran straight between dull hedgerows. Small and uninviting hills rose on each side of it. Not even a beetle stirred on its smooth hard surface. It was a geometrically straight line, I thought, having no beginning and no end. (If there is a Hell for Hikers, such roads will surely exist there.)

I wondered wretchedly what sort of a place Montgomery was, since the road which led to it was so deserted. No one came from Montgomery; no one—save my foolish young self—was optimistic enough to go to Montgomery. Perhaps there was no such place. Perhaps Montgomery was a myth, having no existence in fact, but merely a spurious sort of existence on maps and in guide-books.

So I mused; and then at last, when I had walked many miles, I was relieved to see a figure coming towards me down the straight road. Apparently I was not in Hell; or, if I was, my Hell was not companionless. Moreover, perhaps this man would be able to give me news of Montgomery—was it real? was it near at hand? did it contain an inn?

The figure came nearer, and from his straggling step I guessed what he was; but he was moving faster than a professional tramp moves as a rule, in fact he

seemed to be in a hurry, which is a state unknown to tramps.

Then we met, and we exchanged a dozen sentences. He was a starveling creature, with rags for clothes and a thin white face. I said:

"Good afternoon. You seem to be in a hurry?"
He said:

"I am."

I asked:

"Where are you going, then, at such a pace?"

He said savagely:

"I'm trying to get out of Wales. Please let me go on."

I suggested:

"You don't like Wales?"

He turned round sharply and addressed his remarks less to me than to the grey countryside whence he came.

"They have," he announced, "many savage dogs. They won't let you sleep in their cowsheds. They give their crusts to the chickens. They're as mean as hell. How far is it to England?"

"By the map," I said, "not more than a mile. There's an inn just over the Border, at a cross-roads close to a stream. Here, take this and get yourself a meal. And tell me, before you go, what sort of a place Montgomery is?"

But he didn't answer me. He took my half-crown eagerly, and he gave me a look which seemed to contain more of pity than of gratitude.

"You're going there?" he said.

I nodded.

THE ROAD TO MONTGOMERY

"Why?" he asked. "For fun."

"Oh, God," he said shortly, and hastened away.

DIGRESSION (7)

ON TRAMPS AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL

HE WENT off down the road, shuffling rather than walking, head thrust forward, shoulders hunched, looking neither to right nor left. He was a true tramp, a professional, one of those creatures who do not walk for enjoyment nor in order to reach any particular objective, but who walk merely because, once having started walking, they are unable to stop.

It is a curious reflection that these roofless, hearthless ones, who have shaken themselves free from the fetters of our elaborate social system, who have no obligation to any man, no work to do, no rates and taxes to pay, no income to trouble about—who are, in fact, as free as the wild birds and the woodland foxes (save that they must beg their food instead of stealing it)—these free people are duller and more hidebound by habit than the rest of us. It is as if the strain of setting themselves free has been too much for them; they have used up all their initiative in that one colossal effort, and now they have no initiative left. They have ceased to think at all. They walk by the same route and in the same wide circle all their lives. because they cannot bring themselves to explore a new countryside. (Once, when they began their

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tramping, they suffered and toiled along this route. Then, by chance, they got back to their starting-place. And now they are tied, as it were, to that wide circle. They are like goats tethered to a peg; the radius of their circle—like an invisible rope—ties them to its centre and is the limit of their operations. They have travelled along the same route five, ten, twenty times, and they cannot get away from it. At last, in a ditch or in a Public Institution, they will die at some point on the arc of their circle. For there is no such thing as freedom under the sky.)

More than any suburban clerk who goes to his office every day by the 8.15, these tramps are the slaves of habit. Habit causes them to shamble blindly on, caring nothing for the wild life of hedgerow or lane, and speaking to none but their own kind except in reply to direct questioning—and then only in monosyllables. Habit makes them walk alone, shunning companionship and scorning to make friends with other tatterdemalions.—You will hardly ever see two tramps walking together, even though they are going in the same direction and not more than fifteen yards separate them; and thus they will proceed, without exchanging one word, for twenty or thirty miles.

Habit, again, prevents a tramp from settling down and causes him to remain a tramp until he dies. And this long apprenticeship to solitude eventually makes him into a moron, so that an old tramp is really nothing more than an automaton—a body that sleeps and begs and eats automatically and revolves each year upon a planetary course; but more painfully,

more slowly each year, as if the Force of Gravity which rules the dying planet were gradually becoming less strong!

Of course he may have his secret thoughts, secret loves of meadowsweet and linnet-song, secret wonder at the incredible stars at which he stares up each night from hayrick or roadside. But personally I doubt it. Not one tramp in a thousand is a W. H. Davies; and that sort, anyhow, retains enough initiative to escape before long from the slavery of freedom. The old professional tramp who has failed to escape—he is like a piece of mechanism which Fate has unkindly wound up and so condemned to go on and on, blindly and without purpose, until the mainspring breaks or the wheels run down. . . .

It follows that old tramps are exceptionally lawabiding. To break the law requires a certain amount of initiative which they do not possess; and as a matter of fact—I have it on the personal authority of Mr. W. H. Davies himself—tramps as a class are among the most respectable of men. Indeed, they must needs be; for they are constantly suspect. Whenever a crime is discovered, in the country—whether it is a matter of egg-stealing or poaching or house-breaking or murder—someone remembers having seen a tramp pass that way at about that time: "A horrid-looking, unshaven, dirty old man; the sort who might be guilty of anything." Frequently the tramp is apprehended by the police and held on suspicion.

Therefore these wretched old tramps generally have one fixed purpose which is always uppermost in their

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minds: to avoid trouble at all costs. What few wits they still possess they exercise to this end. Whatever happens, keep out of trouble! Keep your eyes shut and your mouth shut, and if accidentally you see something queer immediately forget that you have seen it! It is almost impossible to persuade a tramp to give evidence in a court of law.

Because they are suspect (and to be a suspected person is in itself a crime), these wanderers have a furtive air. They shuffle along, head down, shoulders bent, eyes on the ground, terrible boots dragging in the road. . . . And these are the free ones, the runaways from civilisation, who are tied to no hearthstone, who have no Duty towards their Neighbour, no friendships to tie them, no monetary obligations, no necessity to work—who receive nothing from society and owe it nothing in return. . . . Yet such is the degree of their slavery that they might well envy the squirrel on the treadmill. Their fate is far worse than his; for he, endlessly pawing, cherishes always a faith in the desirability of freedom. Those woods, those beech-trees, those bluebell glades-if only he could reach them, how happy he would be! So also do we civilised people, tied by the leg to homes, to work, to investments, to lovers, to friendsso do we tease ourselves sometimes by thinking how delightful it would be to be free of all these encumbrances. But the tramp has no such sweet vision. He has looked over that hill, and he has found out that there is nothing at the other side. He has sought freedom, and found it out. He has discovered that it is only a word.

The roads would be dull indeed if the only chance encounters they provided were with these, their slaves, whom they have broken. Luckily there are tramps of other kinds than the professional. There are temporary and accidental tramps—the astute jackof-all-trades who can do most things well, from begging to wood-cutting, but who prefers whenever possible to do no work at all; the unemployed man who is walking to Glasgow to try to get a job in the docks; the sailor without a ship who has come from Cardiff and is bound for Grimsby; the gentlemandown-on-his-luck who confronts you with a passable imitation of a Guards or Etonian tie . . . All these people are interesting. They tell you the tales of their lives, and usually the tales are well worth half-acrown. For my part, the more preposterously untrue they are, the more I enjoy hearing them. The beggar who wants his fare to Manchester (they always want to go to Manchester) never gets a penny out of me. But when a man who has probably never seen the sea in his life—who couldn't tell a mains'l from a t'gallant, a schooner from a brigantine-invents for my delectation a tale of a fishing-smack whose captain suddenly went mad and put out all his sail in a hurricane and then recited psalms on the wave-swept deck until my good liar boldly attacked him, laid him out, and assumed his command—well, then I think it's time to fork out half-a-crown.

But once a little man with a white haunted face and shifty eyes told me a thing so preposterous, so unexpected, that it was probably true. I asked him whence he had come, and he told me 'London'; whither he was going, and he told me he didn't care. "Why," I asked, "surely you have some object in walking from place to place"—for I could see that he was no professional tramp. "I don't care where I go, sir," he said sadly. "It's what I'm getting away from that concerns me." Then he told me, quite simply, that he was fleeing from his wife, and that he dared not ever settle down lest she should seek him out and take him back to her. Perhaps she was a reincarnation of Chaucer's Wife of Bath; for the little man said succinctly: "She gave me no peace at all." I asked him why he did not hide himself in some forgotten village and live there peaceably, and he told me almost with tears: "She'd find me, sir. You see, she's that sort of woman. She'd find me if I stopped, and then there'd be no peace for me, this side the grave."

Later, at an inn, I drank with the little shifty-eyed man; and from his unobtrusive seat in the darkest corner (lest *she* should come in suddenly!) he told me the unprintable reasons why he had left his wife. . . .

These curious encounters make walking worth while. Once I fell in with a troupe of strolling players who gave melodramatic performances of 'Maria Marten' in wayside barns; they were a man short, and for three days they engaged me to take sixpences at the door. On another occasion I walked for two days with a great red-bearded Scot, a wandering preacher, who carried no luggage but the prayer-book and read nothing but the Collect appointed for each day, considering—rightly, I think—that the Collects contained the finest English prose that has

ever been written. Again, I camped once with a large circus and travelling menagerie and—the day being Sunday—organised a great cricket-match between the Senegalese boys and the Italian band; in return for which I was allowed to ride one of the circus ponies and jump through a hoop: a feat which is not so difficult as it sounds.

During another walking-tour (which occupied only a week-end) I walked in turn with a man whose business it was to build footbridges over little streams, a poacher who could tickle a trout and catch a rabbit with his bare hands, an itinerant mole-catcher, and an amazing person, a sort of revivalist, who distributed strange pamphlets and pushed a barrow on which were painted these words: HELLFIRE MISSION, on one side, and on the other EXCEPT YE BE CONVERTED . . .? Yet in private life, as it were, this eater of hellfire was the mildest of men. His sermons smelt of brimstone, but his conversation was mild and friendly, and indeed almost diffident. He played patience in the evenings, and had one great ambition in life: namely, to own a donkey. For thus would the tidings of hellfire be spread more swiftly through the land.

There is one more kind of tramp, and that is the amateur, the hiker—which kind, I suppose, includes myself. Perhaps I am a hiker of a sort; but I must confess that I intensely dislike the majority of other hikers. They are the only people who make me feel really misanthropic.

Two seasons ago, when young men and maidens suddenly ceased to 'walk' and began very seriously to

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'hike', I had a good deal of sympathy for them. I liked to think that they were discovering that lovely, secret England which some of us had known for years, and that one by one, or perhaps two by two, they were adventuring down those old paths, over the moors or through the woodlands, which, in this time of motor cars, are fading for want of friendly feet. I applauded their young enthusiasm and their wandering spirit and their freedom from convention in the matter of clothes; I became almost sentimental about them.

Moreover, I was on their side because they annoyed the respectable folk, and I believe that it is good that respectable folk should be annoyed. There was a great comedy, at that time, which involved a Reverend Father and many letters to the editor from Mothers of Six, and which culminated in the funniest newspaper contents-bill I have ever seen: IS HIKING IMMORAL?¹ Nobody really knew why hiking should be any more immoral than flying or bus-riding or even than big-game hunting; since all these things may be done in pairs. But there it was, the respectable folk sniffed out a heap of imaginary muck and proceeded to rub their noses in it, the Reverend Father preached fearful sermons to Mayfair, the Mothers of Six Hiking Daughters said their distressed say in the Press, Fleet Street had its little joke, and no less a person than Mr. Chesterton joined in, with a mighty gust of logic and laughter, on the side of the moralists. Mr. Chesterton was exceedingly reasonable. He seized upon the cant of certain Defenders of Modern

¹Daily Herald, May, 1931.

Youth who said that Young People Nowadays were so Sensible and Athletic that thoughts of sex simply didn't enter their heads, and so there was no harm in boys and girls going hiking together for weeks or week-ends, since all they wanted of each other was something called Jolly Companionship. In reply to that sort of nonsense, Mr. Chesterton remarked simply that Modern Youth must be a pretty poor lot, as devoid of feelings as jelly fish, and that things had changed a good deal since he was a boy. . . . Trust a Roman Catholic to think straight, and trust Mr. Chesterton to recognise cant when he sees it!

My own view of the matter was simply the 'shocking' one that if young people wanted to sleep together they would probably do so, whether they went hiking or not; that this new sort of 'weekending' would probably do them less harm, in the long run, than tickling their appetites at the pictures; and that what they did beneath their silly little tents was nobody's business but their own. I clapped my hands and wished them luck in their hiking, whether they trod the Primrose Path in couples or whether they went among real primroses with no other company than a rucksack—which is sometimes the best company in the world.

Mr. Chesterton and I, looking at the question from opposite view-points, were at any rate agreed in laughing at the notion of a sexless and athletic Modern Youth. (Mankind has not sunk quite so low as that!) And although Mr. Chesterton would doubtless regard my attitude as damnable and dangerous

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(which feelings I reciprocate towards his) we were united in hating humbug and crooked thinking, of which the newspapers are so full to-day.

Now at this time I thought, in my innocence, that a twenty mile moorland tramp by any other name would feel as sweet. I applauded the hikers because I believed, when the brazen bugles of Fleet Street first heralded them, that the hills and the valleys would please them better than the picture-palaces, that they would find it more fun to wander over England than to go to the 'dogs' on Saturday nights. But soon I discovered that this thing called 'hiking' bore no resemblance at all to 'tramping' or 'walking' or anything of the kind.

It seems to me that the essence of wandering is adventure. Of course I do not mean that it is necessary to hack your way through unmapped jungles or attempt to climb inaccessible peaks. Adventure is largely a matter of mood; and to experience it you need to do no more than walk away from your home with a rucksack on your back and a glorious uncertainty in your mind about where you are going to. Do that, and you'll find adventure before you've travelled ten miles. The queer, friendly folk of the roads will walk with you and talk with you—gipsy, tinker, and tramp; strange and thrilling encounters will greet you round every corner; and this England which we love so much and yet know so little will show you the secrets of her quiet places.

But these hikers, these very courageous and highspirited men and maidens, do they even begin to

know what the word Adventure means? In the summer one cannot travel a mile along a main road without meeting a party of them, a bevy, gaggle, or skein of hikers, striding out from one of the big towns. Nay, an exaltation of hikers—for they sing as they go, like troops on the march. Fifteen or twenty of them altogether, like a herd of beasts. Bid them good morning and ask them whither they journey so noisily, and why they are in such a hurry on a hot day; and thus they will answer:

"At one o'clock we have to be at such-and-such a place, for a picnic luncheon"—ye gods!—"and at four we must be at some other place, for tea... and at nine we finish up at the Great Hikers' Jamboree"—or something of the sort—"for supper and songs round the paraffin stove..."

I am continually troubled with a horrible vision of these people marching through the pleasant shires. I can imagine how all those queer, dear people of the countryside, wandering gipsy, poacher, gamekeeper, and farmer's boy, would flee in terror at their approach; how a thousand eyes would watch them from hedgerow and roadside, and they never get a glimpse of the owners of those eyes, never know the beady-eyed contempt of the little creatures who disapprove of Noise. . . . So they'd go singing on, passing through the quiet places like a devastating tornado, like a blistering wind. Perhaps in some village a professional Oldest Inhabitant would beguile them with an oft-told and toothless tale, perhaps on some beach an aged charlatan of a longshoreman would take them in for the price of a pint of beer. . . . That

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is the best that one can hope for them, in the way of encounters on the road. The secret people of England they'd never meet at all.

I wonder if townsmen have forgotten how to be adventurous? Don't they ever know what it feels like to get away from their crowds and their cities and stride along the road that goes to Anywhere or Nowhere, without a time-table in their pocket nor a care where they sleep that night? I believe they do not. Instead they form themselves into Hikers' Societies and Hikers' Clubs—as if it were necessary to form a society in order to wander off into the blue, as if Chaucer's pilgrims affiliated themselves to a club before they set off down the way to Canterbury, or those other pilgrims made out an agenda and carried a certificate of membership before they started to follow the tinkling bells of the camels on the Golden journey to Samarkand!

I suppose these people enjoy their hikes; though Marco Polo and a few other adventurers might not have thought much of them. I suppose they feel contented and pleased with themselves and pleasantly tired at the end of the day (they ought at least to feel tired, since they carry as much kit for a week-end as I should take for six months). And it's their business after all. It may be that they have discovered a new delight, just as they discovered jazz and yo-yo and crossword puzzles and mah-jongg, in which case it's no affair of mine. But if they really think they've rediscovered the old delight of walking, if they believe they're pilgrims, wanderers, adventurers, when they set out in their khaki hordes on Saturdays—well, they

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must forgive me if I smile, and they must not think me a Superior Person when I declare that I do not hike, but occasionally I like to walk. . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT

WELSHPOOL AND OSWESTRY

WHEN I reached Montgomery, having walked about twenty miles since morning, I discovered that Montgomery had been dead for a very long time. Ruin and decay had come to it. An archæologist might profitably have hunted for bones and stones in its camp and earthworks and tumuli, a historian might have been interested in the site of its battle, but for my part I was so bored that I do not even remember what the place looked like. I try to describe Montgomery, and I remember only that it was a miserable little town set on the slope of a wooded hill. As soon as I could I left it and went off to Llanfair Caerinion. There, for a day, I played truant from my self-appointed task of walking the Marches. I lost myself on the moors, fished for lively little half-pound trout in the river Banwy, and climbed some considerable mountains. I found a pair of ravens nesting in an old quarry, saw a peregrine, and watched, for the better part of the afternoon, two buzzards sailing to and fro across a valley. Recently I had been learning the sport of gliding; and I too, in my clumsy fledgeling fashion, had sailed upon the winds. But these glorious buzzards, floating in the air-currents, banking, diving,

climbing, without effort, made me laugh at my silly adventuring into the element which was their heritage. The little wide-winged, engineless aeroplane had floundered about in it like a pig trying to swim. Having watched the buzzards, I knew that I should never again see any grace or beauty in a glider.

Now nothing will induce me to say precisely where I found these birds. Doubtless I shall receive ingenuous letters from gentlemen who style themselves 'naturalists', pathetically begging me to share the secret with them. Their motives are the highest (they will say); they are lovers of birds, and they merely wish to watch these buzzards from afar. . . . I know these gentlemen. There is one, who lives in Sussex, who has taken twenty-two clutches of buzzards' eggs this very season. Because of his insatiable greed, this island is the poorer by twenty-two rare and beautiful birds. What would be a meet punishment for such a man? There is another who boasts as openly as he dare that he steals the eggs of the kite a still rarer bird—at the rate of four or five clutches a year. There is a third who recently found the nest of a Dartford warbler, took the eggs, guarded her while she laid again, took the second clutch, and so on, until he had four clutches in his cabinet, all laid by that one tiny bird. Had she produced a fifth clutch, he says, he would have left them and allowed her to hatch them in peace. Magnanimous man!... But his magnanimity was never put to the test, for she deserted and has not nested again. Perhaps the strain of laying about sixteen eggs in one season was too much for her; perhaps she is dead. The collector has

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a series of valuable eggs in his cabinet, and Kent has lost one little rare brown bird, and a few snatches of reedy song.

Therefore I shall keep the secret of the buzzards, and no 'bird-lover' shall wrest it from me; and some spring-time—if ever I am a rich man, and have time to spare—I shall take a holiday and become a detective. To outward seeming I shall be a commercial traveller, or a fisherman, or an American tourist; and I shall follow one of these 'bird-lovers' all unknown to him. I shall be close behind him at the station, when he takes his ticket to Wales or Devon, and I shall buy a ticket to the same destination. I shall follow him to his carriage and sit beside him. I shall never let him out of my sight. I shall stay at the hotel at which he stays. I shall dine with him and breakfast with him and drink with him, and I shall be a very genial commercial traveller, a very ardent fisherman, a very innocent American tourist. . . . Yes, I shall follow him as faithfully as if I were one of the Weird Sisters in Macbeth, haunting the sailor who had gone to Aleppo.

"And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, and I'll do, and I'll do!"

Of course, I shall seem to know nothing about birds; but when he goes up to the high hills in the morning—ah, then I shall be very near to him and yet he shall not know I am there. I have not stalked the red deer for nothing; if I can outwit a stag in the Highlands,

I can surely outwit an unwary egg-collector on the moors! And so, as I say, he shall not know that I am near him . . . until he is swinging on his rope above the eyrie and stretching out his hand to take the eggs. Then I shall make my presence known to him. I shall stand up beside the crowbar to which his rope is tied, and in my hand I shall carry a knife. And I shall say to him:

"Sir, our respective situations are such that we may now with advantage discuss the morality of egg-collecting. Your Alpine club rope is not very thick, and I do not think it would take me more than thirty seconds to saw it through with this sharp knife. Pray do not shout for help; it is no use, since you yourself know that this place is exceedingly lonely. . . . Your death will appear to have been a regrettable accident; ropes have worn through before now, by chafing against a stone. . . .

"Now I have here a piece of paper on which is written (a) a voluntary confession of certain of your past sins and (b) an undertaking not to commit such sins in the future. I propose to fold it up, with a pencil inside it, and to let it down to you on a piece of string. You will then, if you think fit, sign it.... But if I were you, I should not waste much time in thinking, because my knife is very sharp and your rope, though strong, is in danger of rubbing against a stone... Thank you, sir. I shall now deliver this document to the authorities, who will doubtless take steps to prosecute you.

"Pray do not be in too much of a hurry to come up. My knife is still handy. . . . Now I have here six

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duck's eggs in a basket, which I am about to let down to you. They are exceedingly rotten. I have been at some pains to ensure that they are as rotten as eggs can be. I propose to sit here, with the edge of my knife just touching your rope, while you devour them one by one. You will make a small hole in the side of each, and you will suck; but if you drop one of them, if you leave one uneaten, there will be a little accident with a knife. . . . Magnificent. One, two. . . . I am very sorry that you were sick, but I am afraid you still have to eat four more. . . . A certain Mikado, I think, would have greatly appreciated your present situation. The punishment, you know, really does fit the crime. ... Four, five. Only one more. Six! I am obliged to you, sir; but I shall now leave you rather hastily, because your complexion displeases me. Good day!"

This deed I shall do—I swear it—next spring or the spring after; some spring, at any rate, before I am too fat to crawl secretly about the hills. Let the egg-collectors be warned; for already I know more about their activities than they would believe.

At the end of my brief holiday, I hastened on towards Oswestry, where I was due next day to keep my appointment with the doctor. I went by bus to Welshpool, which for all its modernity contains some delightful old half-timbered buildings sandwiched between ugly ones, and thence I walked to Oswestry in a kindly soft rain. It was a sweet, clean-scented day; the country looked very new. This was a land of green pastures, small hills, and young wheat: "a good

partridge country," thought that part of my mind which concerns itself with Firsts of September. The birds' songs were very clear and lovely this morning; why is it that the blackbird, particularly, always seems to sing so much more sweetly in the rain? There was one in almost every bush; and, where there was not one, Cock Robin and little Jenny Pooter the wren made up for it with brief bursts of song, short unfinished snatches—as if their small lungs could not contain breath enough for more.

About half-way between Welshpool and Oswestry I passed to the left of Breidden Hill, whose summit is decorated with a tall, pointed object called Rodney's Pillar. Perhaps—no, undoubtedly—I have a nasty mind; but there always seems to me to be something very phallic about these hill-top monuments. native of central Africa, transported hither, would surely bow down and worship the proud, erect thing; an ancient Roman, reincarnated, would make a sacrifice here to the Garden God, thinking this was his shrine. It is difficult, on a spring day, when the warm rain is falling and the weather is of the sort which countrymen call 'growing weather', to believe that they were not wise who worshipped Priapus and the old fruitful gods; yet even if there had been no Christian Church I do not suppose we should have worshipped fertility to-day. Having millions of unemployed, we could not afford to. Rather would sterility be our godhead; the ancient symbol would be capped!

Soon I was walking beside the Shropshire Union

A WELSH FARMHOUSE

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Canal, which joins the Severn at Newtown with the Manchester Ship Canal at Ellesmere Port, so that it is possible thus to sail or row all the way up the Welsh Marches. There are parts of the Severn which are shallow in summer, but it is all navigable to a small craft. A canoe would be best, I suppose, though personally I can say little in favour of canoes; for once I shared one with a friend and endeavoured to paddle all the way down the Thames from Cricklade to Hammersmith. It rained every day steadily and spitefully, we upset the canoe, we blistered our hands, and I suffered perpetual back-ache, in the course of fighting against a strong sou'-west wind; and at last-when we had got to Pangbourne-we decided that a canoe provided too close quarters for the temperaments of two novelists. We remain the best of friends, but we shall never again go canoeing.

You who would explore the Welsh Marches by water instead of by land, take a canoe if you must, but a light rowing boat or a sailing dinghy for preference, and, starting from Sharpness, in the Bristol Channel, go up the tidal portion of the Severn to Gloucester and Tewkesbury; thence up the narrower reaches, high-banked with cliffs of red marl, to Worcester, thence to Bridgnorth, and thence, if your boat has a shallow draught, into the Shropshire Union Canal by one of three ways. You may go up the Afon Vyrnwy to the junction at Llandysilio; or up the River Rhiew to the junction at Berriew; or right up the Severn to the topmost canal lock at Newtown. Thereafter, you will have many locks to

negotiate, and your waterway will cross and recross the counties of Salop and Cheshire, until at last you pass through Chester and come out—via the Ship Canal—into the estuary of the Mersey. Your achievement will have been no small one; your boat's course will have roughly divided England and Wales, and you will have sailed a total distance of four or five hundred miles.

I followed the course of the canal until I reached the village of Pant, where I left it and walked into Oswestry by the main road; but just before I came to Pant I passed through a small place called Llanymynech which was memorable because it contained some of the worst and most pretentious architecture I have ever seen. A sort of residential town is growing up at Llanymynech, and it is unbelievably horrible. The atrocities which compose it are not workmen's cottages, for which the excuse might be made that they were built in a hurry and at the lowest possible cost; they are intended for middle-class people; they are quite big houses—and they are, without exception, beastly houses. They are vulgar, pretentious, and unsightly; they are examples of shocking taste, and they have turned the pleasant village of Llanymynech into a blot upon the side of a hill.

As I walked from Llanymynech to Oswestry I meditated sadly upon them and thought of all the violent and disagreeable adjectives which I would apply to them when I wrote about them in this book; but I regret to say that I have forgotten most of those

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adjectives, and the best I can think of at the moment is the adjective bloody, which expresses my feelings about them quite well.

DIGRESSION (8)

CONVERSATION WITH A DOCTOR

I ENTERED Oswestry in drizzling rain, and on an early closing day. Few English towns would survive such a test, and Oswestry was no exception. It seemed a dismal place, and there was nothing to do except drink or go to the pictures. I called at the principal hotel to find out whether the doctor had arrived yet. but there was no news of him; so I went to the first house at the cinema and saw a very exciting film called The Old Dark House. At about eight-thirty I searched for the doctor again, and this time I found him. He had just arrived, and was trying to explain to the receptionist at the hotel why he possessed no luggage. The girl refused to believe that anybody travelled without at least a small bag or a rucksack, until in desperation the doctor produced his pyjama trousers from his pocket and waved them in front of her eyes. Then she said primly:

"Well, it's very unusual."

"No crime to be unusual," said the doctor cheerfully. "If it was, most women 'd be locked up for wearing unusual hats." Suddenly he looked round and noticed me. He seemed glad to see me, and shook my hand warmly. Meanwhile the trousers of his

CONVERSATION WITH A DOCTOR

green silk pyjamas lay upon the visitors' book, and the girl stared at them with embarrassment and distaste.

"Good man!" said the doctor. "Just on time! Hungry? Let's eat and talk."

He picked up his pyjama trousers, signed the visitors' book, and ordered dinner for two. Ten minutes later we were sipping very hot tomato soup. The doctor had walked all day in drizzling rain, and of course he carried no change, so that now, in the warm dining-room, his clothes began to give forth clouds of steam. He had his back to the fire, and before long he was enveloped in a faint mist, like the vapour which rises from the surface of a pond on a summer morning. His Harris tweeds gave off an acrid smell, pungent, but not unpleasant, which somehow made me think of peat-fires in Hebridean crofts. The waiters, however, sniffed this smell with grave disapproval, and watched the steam rising from his coat with amazement and alarm, as if they had never seen such a phenomenon before.

While he ate hungrily, the doctor talked. He threw me words and scraps of sentences as if he were chucking fragments of food to a beggar.

"Hardly managed to get here to-day. Got delayed. Bit of a surgical job. Dog. Broken leg. Belonged to man at pub. Thought I'd try my hand. Put a splint on. Decent bit of work. He'll walk. Nice feller."

"The man at the pub?"

"No, dog. Little yeller chap. Cocked ears. Eyes—you know; they say: 'Leave it to you, Mister, but try not to hurt.' Like dogs. Nicer than men. Don't

think I like humanity. 'Wish I loved the human race, Wish I liked its silly face'—Sir Walter Raleigh."

After dinner we sat in front of a big fire in the lounge, and the steam from the doctor's wet clothes assumed the proportions of a fog, which hung about us and mixed with the thick clouds of smoke from our pipes. If I shut my eyes I could imagine myself in a Scottish shooting-lodge at the end of the day, with the long Northern twilight outside, and the oil lamps lit, and the smell of wet tweed and tobacco smoke filling the room; and tired men talking jerkily of stags and salmon and sea-trout; and the ghillie or the stalker come in for a dram, a gentleman among gentlemen, saying slowly in his grand Highland speech: "Nay, Mr. Moore, school-learrning's a' vurra weel, but I dinna howd wi' your opeenions. . . . " I suppose it was the smell of rain-soaked Harris that brought me these Scottish memories and made me mention them to the doctor; for assuredly that coat came from Stornaway, and was a bond between us. The doctor smiled and nodded.

"You're right. Every year until ten years ago. Then suddenly—I'd had enough. Never want to kill another stag nor salmon nor bird. Got a twelve-pointer, got a forty-pounder, helped to get five hundred grouse in a day. I'm no humanitarian, but suddenly I'd had enough. You'll get like that sometime. When you're forty. Only stupid people can't see the fun of killing, but only stupid people never get tired of it. Sort of satiety. You notice it in everything. Wise man is always satisfied."

CONVERSATION WITH A DOCTOR

"Women?" I smiled.

"The same. Travel, wine, women, killing things—all the same. Have lots of experience—and stalking, fishing, steeplechasing, cricketing are all legitimate forms of experience, just as much as getting drunk or making love—but stop, if you can, before you lose your sensibility. There are two sorts of fools. The first shuts himself up behind fears and prejudices and has no more experience than he can help, living inside himself. The second has experience but doesn't stop when experience ceases to be new: he goes on till Nature stops him, and then he's got nothing left for the end. The wise man knows when to stop. Forty-five or fifty, with most things."

"And what does he do then?"

"Reads and thinks."

"Was Diogenes, then, a wise man?"

"Yes. But he might have chosen something more comfortable than a tub!"

"And you?" I said daringly.

He shook his head.

"No. Work's my trouble. Can't stop. Thought I could; but I'm fifty now, and I know I can't stop. 'Tisn't because I love the fools. 'Tisn't the sacred cause of humanity. Mine's hack work. Anybody could do it. Broken bones, appendices, T.B., babies. . . . Not even interesting scientifically; got no time for rare diseases in the East End. We pass 'em on to the specialists and the hospitals. No; haven't even got that excuse. I don't want the money either. Thousand a year of my own when I retire. I just can't stop. I've gone on too long. If I stopped now,

I should just go phut. Can't even take a long holiday. Feel it coming on now: the want to get back to work. I can't read and think. As my Sir Thomas says: 'Methinks I have outlived myself and grown to be weary of the sun.'"

"Didn't Macbeth say the same thing somewhere." 'I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun'?"

"Yes. You see, he couldn't stop. He'd supped full with horrors; that was his particular form of satiety. Banquo, Lady Macduff, the children . . . he went on and on." Suddenly the doctor grinned. "His case and mine are really parallel, you know. He ought to have been content with one victim; he ought to have stopped when he'd murdered Duncan. . . ."

Next day we were both up early, and when we had breakfasted we went out together into the street. I was going to Llangollen, but the doctor would not come with me; he said he would avoid crossing the Border, and breaking his vow, by making for Ellesmere and Whitchurch in Shropshire. However, looking at the map now, I see that a detached piece of Flintshire stood in his way, so he probably walked through Wales without knowing that he did so.

"You're an ass!" I told him. "Llangollen's much nicer than Ellesmere. Make a Border raid with me! Come into Tom Tiddler's Ground, just for a day!"

He shook his head.

"I'll stick to England."

So off he went, that queer fellow, who was working himself to death, and knew it, yet was unable to stop.

DEE BRIDGE, LLANGOLLEN

CONVERSATION WITH A DOCTOR

As I watched him go down the road I saw his hand steal to his pocket and bring out one of those small leather-bound books; he opened it and went on, head bent over it, like a schoolboy walking towards the examination-room. Did he, who believed in nothing, seek comfort and assurance in Sir Thomas Browne's splendid unquestioning certainty? I do not know.... He walked away, and I never saw him again. I suppose he's back at work now, doing his daily round of 'broken bones, appendices, T.B., and babies', with no holiday in prospect for another two years. And when he stops (as he says himself) he'll just go phut; since we pay for all our excesses—even for excess of work.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE GLYN VALLEY AND LLANGOLLEN

ON THIS St. Patrick's morning I had a pleasant walk up the valley to Selattyn, and along the course of Offa's Dyke, until at last I came down into another valley, that of the Glyn, which is one of the loveliest, and also one of the strangest, in the whole of Wales. Near to Llansantffraid I stopped at an inn and talked to some young men who were drinking there. Two of these young men—there were eight in all—had never been out of their own beautiful valley; most of the others had travelled no further than Cefn, Ruabon, and Oswestry. And three of them had never been to the pictures!

Now this was simply astonishing, because the Glyn valley is in no sense isolated—it lies, indeed, at the edge of a big industrial area. I had thought that, for good or ill, there was hardly a young person in Europe who had never been to the pictures. Even in the remotest villages of the Sierra Nevada in Spain I had seen the girls reading cinema magazines; in fact I had found it difficult to talk to them upon any topic other than the private lives of Greta Garbo and Ronald Colman. Yet here I was in Britain, not fifteen miles from a picture palace, not forty miles from a big city,

THE GLYN VALLEY AND LLANGOLLEN

talking to three young men to whom these names meant nothing at all!

Soon I discovered the reason for this strange thing. Apparently the Glyn valley is a stronghold of the Baptist Church. It is ruled by the ministers; and the ministers disapprove of the cinema and dissuade their flock from visiting it. These Baptists seem to believe that any diversion, ancient or modern, is likely to lead to damnation; for the young men told me that no dances nor dramatic performances were held in the valley. "The minister," they said, "tells us that a girl who goes to dances is a sister of the devil!" I felt as if I were visiting some strange, lost tribe of savages. Did they read the newspapers? I asked. They shrugged their shoulders. The wireless? Some had it, but they preferred the gramophone, on which they could play repeatedly their favourite songs, such as "Will the Angels Play their Harps for Me?" Cricket? Football? No, they weren't keen. Then what the devil did they do with themselves, when work was over?...

They said that they had the chapels and the pubs, and the girls had the Band of Hope meetings, and of course there was Courting on dark nights. . . . They giggled, and I concluded that in spite of the Baptist ministers the young folk of the Glyn valley succeeded in having occasional moments of 'fun', in their queer, furtive, sneaking way.

For all its natural beauty, I was very glad to get away from this valley, whose inhabitants were devilworshippers and were ruled by ancient tribal superstitions. For it is difficult to believe that the God of

the Llansantffraid Baptists is anything other than a very primitive sort of devil, whose taboos are arbitrary and unreasonable, like those which occur among African savages.

I walked slowly and sadly away from Llansantsfraid, in the company of an old man who had promised to put me on my way to Llangollen. This old man professed to be very broad-minded because he allowed his children to read an illustrated Bible on Sunday. Apparently this was heretical: upon the Sabbath, most of the children in that valley were permitted only to read a Bible which contained no pictures.

I felt very depressed, thinking of Sunday mornings at Llansantffraid, and all those little children wretchedly turning over the pages of Bibles which contained no jolly pictures of Delilah cutting off Samson's hair or of Daniel in the Lions' Den. I thought, too, of the girls whose misfortune it was to be brought up in the Glyn valley and who never experienced the cheerful, innocent, silly things that other girls enjoyed—holding hands in the pictures, and falling in love with Douglas Fairbanks, and wearing pretty frocks at dances, and going about in absurd hats.

Poor girls, wasting their youth on Band of Hope meetings and Sunday School tea-parties! I only hope that the young men of their valley have the arts which make up for these losses, and exercise them on dark nights when the minister is not abroad to see them. . . . Call him a God or a Devil, I like not this Being who rules over the valley of Llansantffraid!

THE GLYN VALLEY AND LLANGOLLEN

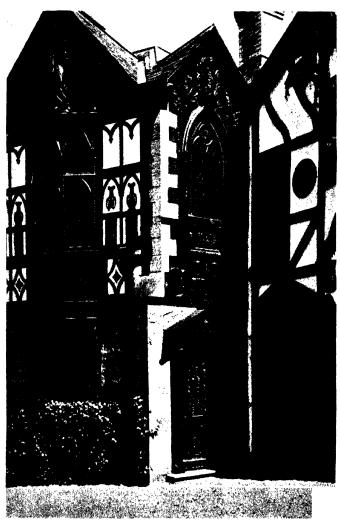
As I walked up the mountain on my way to Llangollen the rain, which had continued steadily all day, became heavier yet. The scenery and the weather were typically Welsh. The mountains looked fierce and beautiful, with the storm-clouds like torn cloaks about them; the rain came down vindictively, passionately, driving into my face and nearly blinding me. On my way up the steep track I met a man who bade me good-day and said cheerfully: "Turning wet." By this time it had been raining for about four hours, so I heartily agreed.

The air was filled with the crying of curlews, which I could not see because of the thick weather, so that it seemed as if a company of disembodied spirits were wailing about me. I was foolishly walking without a compass, and soon I had lost my way; it was three and a half hours before I got down to Llangollen, tired and wet and very angry with myself for losing my way on such a little mountain. If I had kept to the track, instead of going across country, I should have reached my destination at least two hours before.

Already the Dee was coming down swiftly. The mountains behind Bala had had their share of the rain, and now the river was brown and foamy, and ran noisily beneath the famous stone bridge of Llangollen, which was built in the middle of the 14th century by Dr. John Trevor, a bishop of St. Asaph.

In spite of the rain, Llangollen seemed very delightful. Behind it the foothills rose towards the big mountains, and gave it a semi-Alpine appearance. The town was old in parts, and where it was old it was beautiful; but other parts of it were Victorian, and

these were very ugly indeed. The anonymous author of a most entertaining old guide-book Black's Picturesque Guide to North Wales, complained in 1860 that Llangollen's "streets are narrow, irregular, and ill-paved; and the houses are, for the most part, old and mean, but are gradually giving place to modern and more handsome dwellings". To-day, these 'Modern and more handsome dwellings' compose the greater part of the little town, for they have the terrible permanence of the 1870 period; they will never fall into decay, Time has no dominion over them, and no amount of weathering can mitigate their stolid, solid ugliness. They will withstand anything except perhaps dynamite for the next three hundred years. One cannot help wishing that more of the 'old and mean' houses had been left, to delight an age which sees no beauty in the Albert Hall.



PLAS NEWYDD, LLANGOLLEN

DIGRESSION (9)

ON THE FUNCTIONS OF A GUIDE-BOOK—BEING A REPLY
TO CERTAIN CRITICS

MY NAMELESS GENTLEMAN, the author of Black's Picturesque Guide to North Wales, held the opinion that Llangollen should be taken as the hors d'œuvres of a tour rather than as the savoury. "Llangollen," he declares, "should undoubtedly be visited at the beginning of the route; because the scenery, having few features of grandeur and sublimity, and characterised rather by gentle, tranquil beauty, may appear tame and unimpressive, if contemplated shortly after the powerful excitement of the elevated, mountainous districts of the principality."

A grand sentence, itself resembling the architecture of the Albert Hall. And there is one great advantage in the use of this sort of Victorian prose: it is the best medium in the world for him who would damn with faint praise or dismiss a subject with a contemptuous sniff. Now, our author is a very critical person; he is no idle flatterer, and he is determined to say exactly what he thinks—yet he remembers that he is a Victorian gentleman, and he must never descend to anything so vulgar as the use of the epithet. Nor must

he employ the epigram, which is a Gallic weapon, like the pointed sword. No; his criticism must be dignified rather than agile, and well wrapped up, so that it has the effect of a stunning deadening blow on the back of the head. It rolls steadily along, his steam-roller prose, with the terrific assurance of an age which built an empire. It flattens anything that gets in its way. Yet is he, one wonders now and thenis he being ironic, or is he merely being grave? In his preface he tells us solemnly that the inhabitants of Wales "are a distinct and very remarkable people . . . retaining much that is peculiar in physical appearance." Then he goes his fastidious way through the towns and villages of North Wales, and he has nothing very good to say about any of them. He is a great lover of tidiness; he would have delighted in the layout of New York, for of Holywell he complains "the streets are irregular"; of Abergele "it consists chiefly of one wide, irregular street"; of Conway "strangers are apt to indulge expectations which the first near view of its poor, ill-built, neglected streets will be likely to disappoint"; and he laments that Llangollen "has not the neat and orderly appearance of an English town". He is the first advocate of town-planning, congratulating Bala on being "more regularly built than most Welsh towns". Such qualified approval, from him, is a bouquet indeed; for he is a rather mournful person, pessimistic by nature, and he is loath to raise any considerable hopes in the tourist's bosom. He had learned bitterly that realisation is scarcely ever equal to expectation. Thus he quotes Lord Lyttleton's praise of Festiniog and adds wearily "Encomiums lavished on this spot by other writers are not repeated here, lest expectations should thereby be unduly raised, only to occasion disappointment"; and of the Vale of Clwyd he writes: "This renowned valley has been so highly, and even extravagantly eulogised, that strangers may find its beauties fail to satisfy the anticipation with which they approach." For his part, he is not likely to produce in his reader any anticipatory cheerfulness; black misery is the tourist's lot, and well he knows it. Flint, "although a country town . . . has rather the appearance of a neglected, decaying village"-a comment which is hardly designed to popularise it with visitors. Its streets, moreover, "are so broken by dilapidated walls, and partially removed houses, as to have a ragged and repulsive aspect." Finally, "the town has sometimes aspired to rank as a bathing-place, but the beach being marshy, is quite unsuitable." He notes that the population is 2845, and then he has finished with Flint; he has put it in its place. However, it is yet necessary to mention the castle, and lest anybody should be foolish enough to visit the place on that score he remarks that "the whole (castle) is now in a very decayed state, and being utterly neglected, seems likely soon to disappear."1 archæologist who goes to Flint Castle may expect to find that its stones and ramparts have vanished into thin air. Serve him right; he's had his warning!

Our guide next goes on to Rhyl, whose "shore is flat and uninteresting . . . and the adjacent country, for some miles in every direction, is a dull, uninviting

¹Incidentally, it's still there.

level". (Them's my sentiments, too.) Capel-Curig is "an insignificant hamlet"; Dolgelley, for some reason not specified, is "not particularly eligible as a resting-place for tourists"; Denbigh, though possessing natural beauties, "is inadequately supplied with water"; and so, possibly, is Llanfyllin, in connexion with which place he quotes the saying "old ale fills Llanfyllin with young widows". His next sentence, by design or by accident, is a simple statement that "the market is held on Thursday". Draw your own conclusions!

Newtown comes in for a qualified bouquet: half roses, half hemlock! For though it is "a populous, busy manufacturing town" its "streets are confined, and the houses, for the most part constructed of lath and plaster, have a mean appearance". Likewise, Machynnlleth gets flowers and raspberries at the same time. Its houses, for the most part, are of very respectable appearance, but "it has, notwithstanding, rather a dull and gloomy aspect". As for Barmouth, though it provides good bathing and "forms an agreeable residence", it is evidently inclined to be too well pleased with itself, and must be taken down a peg. Sure enough, in due course it receives its raspberry. "Barmouth has been frequently, but most absurdly, compared with Gibraltar and Edinburgh." If our author had said plainly: "Presumptuous upstart!" he could not have expressed his meaning better.

One place, however, really delights him. Beddgelert rouses him to a pitch of enthusiasm, to a warmth of expression, which is almost, but not quite, beyond

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the bounds of propriety. It is "a charming picturesque village" and contains "a spacious and well-managed hotel, with one of the best coffee-rooms in England". "It is an admirable station for . . . artists and anglers, and should be included in the route of every tourist." Surely, after this, he can find nothing to say against Beddgelert? But alas! our writer knows too well that there is always the fly in the ointment, the pill hidden in the jam. There is always a snag somewhere! And Beddgelert's very virtues are its ruin, its very perfection is instrumental in making it imperfect. Our exacting guide is compelled in honesty to declare that even at Beddgelert the tourist's life is not all beer and skittles; for "in the height of the season, it is not infrequently excessively crowded"!

I like this unknown Victorian, and I feel a great sympathy for him. I can understand the mood in which he made his (at that time) adventurous tour, his annoyance at the discomforts which he met with, his slightly cynical conviction that the people for whose benefit he was writing would probably be a good deal happier if they stayed at home. I picture him as tall and thin, resembling a Spy cartoon, with dismal-looking Dundreary whiskers and perhaps an eyeglass, through which he coldly regards each successive resort which he visits, remarking dryly "flat and uninteresting" or "the steep hills are a great weariness to tourists". It won't be his fault if anybody goes there after reading his book!

His guide is the more refreshing because almost all

such books, from 1860 down to the present day, have been chiefly panegyrics; they have scarcely ever attempted criticism, even in the mildest form, and more fulsomely than John of Gaunt they have set out to praise

"This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

And yet, after all, are praise and eulogy the proper functions of a guide-book? Is not fair criticism, even the most exacting criticism, more greatly to be desired? Apart from the question of the writer's honesty, it seems to me that he who pays the piper should be allowed to call the tune; and surely the reader, who has paid seven and sixpence for the book, is desirous not only of knowing what places to visit, but what places to avoid?

Nevertheless, there is a popular feeling that the author of a guide-book has a sort of duty towards the places he writes about; that he should let them down lightly, even if he cannot whole-heartedly praise them. The book-critic and the dramatic critic have no such obligation towards bad books and bad plays; and why the critic of towns and scenery should not also have leave to speak his mind I do not know. But I do know that any degree of honesty on his part, any directness of speech, will occasion the bitterest resentment in the places which he criticises.

Two years ago, I published a book called Tramping Through Wales in which I spoke my mind very

ON THE FUNCTIONS OF A GUIDE-BOOK

freely and openly upon all matters which might concern the tourist in that country. I criticised chiefly Welsh architecture, Welsh customs, Welsh licensing laws, and the Welsh Sunday. I thought it only fair that my reader, who perhaps proposed to pay a visit to Wales, should have a knowledge of these things and of how they would affect him. Wales thought differently. I received a very jolly collection of abusive and anonymous letters and a most entertaining bundle of press-cuttings. Listen to what Wales said about John Moore:

"Mr. Moore, of course, is posing. . . . (He) is writing either with his tongue in his cheek or with a mind . . . ugly and ill-balanced. . . . He has imbibed too freely at the fountain of Caradoc Evans. He is so violent that it is no more possible to be angry with him than at the small boy who becomes ill-mannered and shouts shrill abuse at his enemy." 1

"This is sad nonsense. . . . It may be said that this kind of stuff should be ignored. I do not agree. Books of this kind are read by people who know nothing about Wales and who may form their impression of the country from them. It is, it seems to me, necessary to enter an emphatic protest against statements that blacken the character of a nation."

And so on. But I did not begin to feel really impor-

¹Herald of Wales.

²Liverpool Post.

tant until I saw the excellent headline "PRINCIPALITY PILLORIED . . . ENGLISH WRITER'S ONSLAUGHT" sprawled across a London daily and read the following paragraphs beneath it:

"Caustic comments on Welsh religious buildings and the Welsh Sunday which appear in a new volume just issued, are arousing protests in various parts of the Principality. . . .

"A prominent member of the Welsh Nationalist Party said yesterday: It is no use putting one's name to a reply to such a book as this and the many others which are annually published attacking Wales. I suppose English writers think it is clever to sneer at Wales and its people. They do not understand Wales, and they do not want to do so. They only want cheap publicity."

By this time I had a whole swarm of hornets buzzing about my head, and I began to realise that the Welsh suffer from a sort of persecution mania, an ultrasensitiveness to criticism, which manifests itself in the form of hysteria whenever anybody ventures to criticise their country or their institutions. Recently, for instance, both Cardiff and Swansea refused to accept the loan of a portrait of Mr. Caradoc Evans, painted by Evan Walters, the Welsh artist; and at Barry the Chairman of the Town Council (Mr. J. R. Llewelyn) ceremonially burned in the local refuse destructor a copy of Mr. Caradoc Evans' play Taffy, which caused such a commotion when it was produced in 1925. Mr. Llewelyn, defending his action before

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the Council, who had requested him to replace the book, replied: "It was my great joy to consign this infernal volume to the ashes of Hades."

The thing known as a sense of humour seems to be sadly deficient in Wales!

Now, with regard to the function of a guide-book, I think it should point out ugliness as well as beauty; while it should encourage the reader to visit pleasant places, it should warn him against going to towns which are unpleasing or inhospitable. (In this way it may be a powerful influence for good, since a town which finds itself neglected by tourists may set about mending its manners.)

I think a guide-book should also remark and criticise any local customs or restrictions which may interfere with the tourist's liberty; thereafter, if he dislikes interference with his liberty, he tours at his peril. This criticising of local customs was my heinous sin in *Tramping Through Wales*: I said what I thought about the Welsh Sunday.

Now, the manner in which the inhabitants of Wales choose to keep their Sabbath is, of course, no business of mine, nor of any other Englishman; and for all I care they may stand all day upon one leg, like St. Simeon Stylites. But when they try to inflict their tribal superstitions upon me, then I believe I have a legitimate grievance, and I am justified in warning other travellers who may be similarly affected. For nobody can say that the miseries of a Welsh Sunday do not affect a visitor in Wales. Only the other day

¹Reported in The Observer.

I was fishing in Montgomery. I paid half-a-crown for a ticket to fish in a certain brook. It was Sunday. I began to fish beneath a bridge, but a number of youths gathered on the bridge and threw stones in the water in order to drive me away. (How typical of the Welsh character was this action! I have noticed that a Welshman will seldom take the offensive unless he is one of a crowd, or is drunk, or is in such a position that he cannot possibly be hurt. The Scot also objects to Sunday fishing, but he is no coward, and would scorn to stand on a high bridge and rain stones on the man below. He would have the courage of his convictions, and would come down and duck the fisherman!)

I moved on upstream, and eventually I came to a mill. An old bearded man in a bowler hat came out of the mill and addressed me solemnly:

"Young man, young man, do you read your Bib-le? Do you know what the Bib-le says, about fishing on the Sab-bath?"

"Nothing, surely!"

He shook a long, crooked finger at me.

"It says you shall do no work on a Sunday!"

I shrugged my shoulders and fished on. The miller shouted at me:

"You are fish-ing below my mill, and on a Sun-day too! Now if you would give me a shilling, say, for the privilege. . . ."

I took no notice and hastened upstream, where I was soon accosted by a farmer.

"What iss this?" he demanded. "Fishing on a Sunday? We used not to put up with it, but now I

ON THE FUNCTIONS OF A GUIDE-BOOK

suppose we have to. Now last week there were two gentlemen here, fishing on a Sunday. I said I did not like it, yes; and they put their hands in their pockets and brought out half-a-crown each. Very nice gentlemen..."

"Damn fools!" I said cheerfully, and went on. About noon I came to a place which I could fish better by wading ashore and casting from the bank. Suddenly I heard a great noise in the field behind me, much shouting and many oaths, and looking round I perceived a fat, florid person approaching me at a run. His bowler hat was perched on the back of his head, he was dressed in the black-beetle habiliment of a Welshman who has just come from 'Capel', and he seemed to be in such a temper that I deemed it wise to take to the water, lest he should assault me then and there.

I waded out into mid-stream, like a stag at bay, and he stopped on the bank, mopping his face with a handkerchief. Then he screamed at me:

"Do you know that you are trespassing? And on a Sunday? Fishing upon my land, on a Sunday?"

I thought this business had gone on long enough.

"Look here," I said, "I have paid to Mr. Jones, at the Hotel, half-a-crown for the privilege of fishing his stream. I've got the ticket here. Stop shouting, and tell me quietly what's the matter."

"Indeed, you may have paid half-a-crown to Mr. Jones or you may not; that is nothing to do with me. But look, Mr. Jones pays me four shillings a year for the rent of this bank, and this year he has not paid it yet, and already it iss May, and there was nothing

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said in the Agreement about the fishing on a Sunday. . . . It iss a very funny business, you know, fishing on a Sunday. Very funny business. Now if I had two shillings, say, or even one shilling, for the privilege, I should not mind so much, no. I should say good luck to you, though I do not know how you can expect to catch any fish on a Sunday. Two shillings, say, or even one shilling. . . ."

The value of a Welshman's religious conscience varies with the individual, but is generally worth something between sixpence and half-a-crown; yet you could not buy the principles of a Scottish Presbyterian for a hundred pounds. For this reason I respect the prejudices of the Scot, even to the point of forbearing to drive my car on Sunday when I am staying in the strict north-west; but I find it impossible to respect a prejudice which disappears as soon as I put my hand in my pocket, and when I am in Wales on Sunday I do exactly as I please. As far as possible, however, I avoid being in Wales on Sunday; and I advise my reader to do likewise.

CHAPTER TEN

JOURNEY'S END

AND NOW I had come to the top of the Marches; it only remained to go to Chester and so to put a good round period to my walking-tour. Thither I went next day, three-quarters of the way by bus and the last quarter upon my feet, for the look of the thing.

I was glad indeed that I did not have to walk through Cefn-Mawr and Ruabon, which have blotted out the side of a hill; and I was grateful for the bus which carried me so swiftly into Wrexham and bore me so swiftly away from Wrexham, of which town I can and will tell you two things only. The first I learned from a guide-book: to wit, that a tombstone in the church-yard bears the following pleasing inscription:

"Here lies five babes and children dear, Three at Oswestry, and two here."

The second piece of information about Wrexham I give you from first-hand. The pubs do not open until half-past eleven in the morning. My bus left for Chester at eleven twenty-five.

In the afternoon—having walked the last five miles—I came to Chester, which I know of old, and love. I visited the castle and the cathedral (of which, by the way, the author of *Black's Picturesque Guide* says regretfully: "It has a ragged, mouldering appearance") and I sat upon the good bridge and listened to the song which the Dee was singing, about the rain which had fallen in the hills.

And then, at evening, I walked slowly round the old city wall, and thus, as the dusk fell, wrote a neat full-stop to my wanderings.

DIGRESSION (10)

ON HOTELS

"AND I in my bed again. . .!"

At the beginning of this book I fervently quoted two lines of an early anonymous poem; and now, having stayed at sixteen different hotels within three weeks, I echo the sentiments of that poem once more. To be back in my own bed again; under my own roof; among my own possessions—surely this, the homecoming from travel, is more than half of the joy of travel. We leave our own hearths in order that we may the more gladly return to them.

Yet it should not be so—it would not be so, if our English hotels were not so wickedly and wantonly bad. There are good ones, of course; and these few, I think, are the best hotels in the whole world. But on the average, reckoning all hotels and all seasons, and balancing the money you pay against the service you get for it, I think there is little doubt that the ordinary English hotel is the worst in Europe, if not in the world.

Now probably the mortification of the flesh is good for us; too much comfort makes for softness in a man's soul as well as in his body, and tends to produce too easy philosophies. A certain carelessness of comfort

is a part of our English national character; it has Made Us What We Are. And so when I complain of the deficiencies of English hotels I am not doing so because I am shy of hardship, but merely because I dislike paying for hardship. I have journeyed about in tramp-steamers and trawlers, and I have slept on the ground, with a tent over me and without one, in all sorts of uncomfortable places, from the Glyders in a thunderstorm to Mulahacén in the snow. These were adventures of my own seeking, and I think I even enjoyed them; but when I was putting up every night at different hotels along the Welsh Marches I was certainly not seeking adventure; I was paying for comfort and ease and a friendly welcome. There were some at which I got little more of the former than a bare hill in Snowdonia could provide, and much less of the latter than I received one night from a brigand who lived in a cave in Andalusia.

The tourist who takes his holiday in July, August, or September has no conception how bad an English hotel can be. By that time the places have smartened themselves up, they have engaged their seasonal staff, and they have got their domestic economy into running order. They are still bad, compared with Continental hotels, where one is allotted a bedroom-with-private-bathroom as a matter of course at a smaller cost than that of a bedroom alone in England; but at least they are tolerable, because they are prepared. Travel in March, as I did, and catch them unawares! . . . That advice is purely rhetorical. Do not, if you value your comfort, your health, your life even—do not venture within their doors before the 'season';

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but while the March winds blow dismally down the chimneys travel vicariously with me.

Here, then, are the comments which I jotted down each morning. Naturally, I cannot give the names of the hotels concerned; nor are they placed here in the order in which I visited them.

- (1) An A.A. and R.A.C. hotel in a small country town. I arrived at 7.30 in the evening. An old woman greeted me at the door. I said: "Can you put me up for the night?" She replied: "I suppose we shall have to." Next she said: "Shall I light a fire in the sitting-room?" Since it was a bitterly cold evening in mid-March, this question seemed rather unnecessary. There was no dinner to be had; but she said "she could do me something". I demanded a hot bath, but the water was tepid. I supped eventually off cold chicken in a large and chilly dining-room. It is only fair to add that the manageress, who arrived home later, was very apologetic indeed; she told me that she didn't expect visitors at that time of year. Nevertheless, it was her job to expect visitors at any time of year.
- (2) An A.A. hotel. This was the worst of the lot. It was dirty. The enamel of the bath was chipped and flaky, and scratched me when I sat down. The walls of my bedroom were distempered a horrible shade of pink, which had faded into a still more horrible shade; the distemper was rapidly peeling, showing ochreous wallpaper beneath. My bedroom door would not latch, and I had to jam it with a chair. My bed was a feather bed, presumably

stuffed with lumps of coal. 'Dinner'—a tough steak and tomatoes. The hotel was lit by gas, which continually popped, flickered, and leaked. I asked to be called at eight, and was duly called by means of a knock on my door. But when later I opened the door I found no hot water jug outside, and as the bell in my room would not ring, I had to fetch my own (tepid) shaving water from the bathroom. Breakfast—half-cooked lumps of ham.

- (3) An A.A. and R.A.C. Hotel. Very big and pretentious, also very expensive. The receptionist put me in Room 30, at the top of the house, although the lower floors were not yet full. Service was good; dinner (6/-) was very bad.
- (4) An A.A. Hotel. I was charged 2/6 for the bread and cheese and celery which I had for lunch. When I protested, the price was reduced to 1/6—200 per cent profit. Here again I had to sleep in a feather bed: a contoured model of the Pennine Chain, which at about two o'clock in the morning became the Alps, the Rockies, the Himalayas—became Mount Everest itself.
- (5) A commercial hotel. Fair food and service, but the lounge was furnished in careful imitation of a dentist's waiting-room, and my bedroom window refused to open, while the bathroom window refused to shut.
- (6) A country inn. Dinner consisted of the usual tough mutton and a greenish mess called Veges. The geyser nearly blew up when I essayed a bath. The chambermaids were sluts, and the landlord was stone-deaf. The waitress was bearded like the

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pard, and had a squint. In conjunction with the Veges, this was too much for me. I wish people would choose presentable wenches for jobs like this!

Of the other hotels which I visited, six were fair but quite impersonal, undistinguished in any way but tolerable as resting-places for a night or two. Three were very good indeed, and deserve mention by name. I am glad to give them this measure of publicity, and I hope that no evil-minded person will suspect that I am receiving something in return. Here they are:

The Speech House Hotel, Forest of Dean: A very well-managed Trust House.

The Beaufort Arms Hotel, Tintern: A really first-class hotel, and one of the best I know.

The Royal Oak, Welshpool: An example of a comfortable, well-run commercial hotel.

Now let us return to my Index Expurgatorius. You will notice that all except one of the hotels which I mentioned therein were fairly big hotels. They were also fairly expensive. Unfortunately, the cheap and small hotels are even worse, and there is really no such thing as a poor man's hotel in the country, since the village inn is generally lacking in accommodation and is often unwilling to be troubled with guests. The only really cheap hotels are the places which call themselves Temperance Hotels, and cater chiefly for cyclists; but an hotel where you cannot buy a glass of

beer when you want it seems curiously cold and lacking in hospitality, and as I disapprove of the misuse of the word Temperance (which has come to imply Prohibition) I have never ventured inside one of these chilly-looking places.

You will also notice that four of the hotels in my *Index* were blessed by one or other, or both, of the motoring organisations which have taken upon themselves the job of recommending reliable accommodation to tourists. The pioneer work of the A.A. and the R.A.C. has been excellent, and these bodies have probably done more than any others to improve the standard of hotel-keeping in the last few years. However, I think they should try to assure that their 'recommended' hotels keep up to a reasonable standard in the 'off' season as well as in the summer.

Of course, there is no doubt that hotels have improved enormously during the last year or two. People who have been accustomed to go abroad have been spending their holidays in England instead, and their numerous and bitter complaints are beginning to bear fruit. This improvement is chiefly noticeable in the bigger and more expensive hotels; visitors to the smaller ones, in the country, will put up with almost anything, and as a result they get—almost anything.

Now here are a few suggestions of 'grounds for complaint'. I commend them to the landlords and managers of hotels large and small, and to the guests, who can get them removed if they complain loudly enough.

First of all, there is the question of silly and

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unnecessary restrictions—the petty meannesses which result in such notices as this, posted in the bedrooms:

GUESTS ARE NOTIFIED THAT THE ELECTRIC LIGHT WILL
BE SWITCHED OFF AT TWELVE O'CLOCK MIDNIGHT.

This strikes me as a piece of sheer impertinence. The best way of dealing with it is to go to bed late, demand the light, and say you will leave next day unless the notice in your bedroom is removed.

Another form of meanness, which saves the hotel a few shillings a year and loses it several pounds in custom, manifests itself in a notice like this, in the writing-room:

THE MANAGEMENT REGRETS THAT IN FUTURE WRITING PAPER AND ENVELOPES MUST BE OBTAINED ON APPLICATION AT THE OFFICE, AS CONSIDERABLE LOSS HAS BEEN INCURRED OWING TO PERSONS TAKING IT AWAY.

This seems to be a gratuitous insult which even the loss of a few pounds' worth of writing-paper does not justify. A third parsimony is that of placing the slips of paper which show the prices of short drinks and cocktails under the glass tops of the tables, so that one has to turn round the table, or get up and walk round it, or lean over and twist one's head into impossible positions, in order to read it at all. Since these slips of paper can be printed at the cost of a few shillings a thousand, it seems hardly worth the landlord's while to save the cost of a thousand at the price of

painful acrobatics and ridiculous contortions on the part of his guests.

With regard to food, you must realise that you cannot—in England—expect really good cooking at a moderate price. Nor can you expect a great variety of dishes. Nevertheless, you will be justified in complaining if the traditional Mutton and Veges appears at the table more than three times in a week. You will be justified in asking for fresh fruit for breakfast, and making a row if you don't get it. And you will not be exceeding your rights if you demand a very light lunch—say bread and butter and celery and cheese—at a fair price, which is about a shilling.

The service should be reasonably quick and at any rate courteous; but if it is slow it is usually the fault of the management, for keeping an inadequate staff, and it is not fair to curse the waiters and waitresses, who can't answer you back. (I hate people who bully servants.) If I were the landlord of an hotel, one of the first things I should think of would be the happiness of my staff; a contented staff ensures the smooth running of the house, and smiling faces make a good impression upon the guests. I should also exercise a censorship of features; I don't like having ugly people about me, and probably some of my guests might feel the same.

Next comes the question of baths and beds. At an hotel you should be able to get a hot bath at any time. If you come in wet after fishing or walking you are just as likely to want a bath at three o'clock in the afternoon as at seven o'clock in the evening, and you

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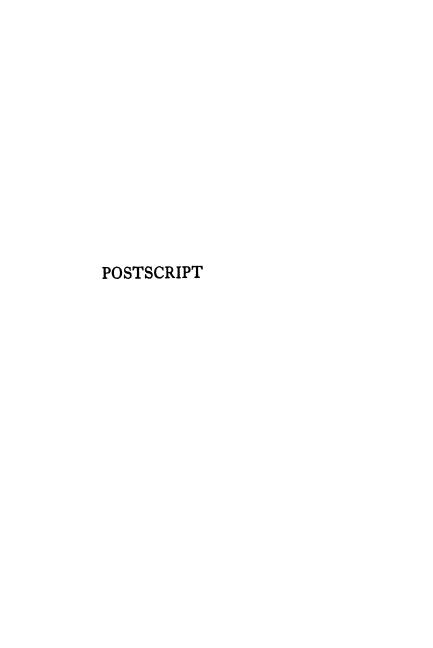
are within your rights in making a fuss if there is no hot water.

Your bed is very important; and if, like me, you hold feather-beds in abomination, there is no earthly reason why you should be compelled to sleep in one. The bedclothes should fit the bed, otherwise they will be on the floor before morning. The bedroom window should shut or open at will. The pictures on the walls should not be offensive oleographs or hideous engravings. There should be a hook on the door for the loop of your razor-strop, and shaving-papers on the washstand lest you be tempted to cut the towel with your razor.

Were I the landlord of an hotel, I should see that my guests had no grounds for complaint in these matters. I should also observe these simple rules. I should greet all my guests personally, and shake them by the hand and say "I'm so glad to see you"because, after all, it's my own house and they are my guests; the bill that will come later is nothing to do with that. Then, all my maids should be pretty maids, and all my men-servants good-looking. My barmaid should be a good old-fashioned, jolly, flirtatious, boisterous sort of barmaid—not a sour old hag with a face like a wet week. My beds should be comfortable, and there should be hot water always at hand. The lounge should be furnished like a lounge and not like a surgery, and the magazines on its tables should not be merely-and obviously-free copies of trade papers sent to my hotel as an advertisement. I should betray no surprise when my guests asked for grapefruit at breakfast or wanted to have luncheon or tea

in the garden. I should hedge them about with no silly restrictions, because I should remember that they were on holiday. If they wanted to walk about or play tennis in their bathing-dresses they could do so. And finally, upon the mantelpiece in the bedroom of each guest who arrived tired in the evening there should stand, unasked for, a glass of decent sherry.

Then, if other travellers are like myself, I think I should make a fortune.



POSTSCRIPT

ON THE ART OF WALKING

THROUGHOUT this book, I have used the word 'hiker' as a term of abuse. You and I, reader, (how subtly I flatter you!)—you and I are walkers; the common herd are hikers. You and I are tourists; the rest are trippers. . . . It is the old snobbery. Nevertheless, I think there is a very real distinction between 'walking' and 'hiking', and I should put it like this: walking is a diversion, whereas hiking is a form of athletics.

Originally a hiker was one who carried his sleeping and cooking kit with him; but words change their meanings, and to-day the word 'hiker' has come to signify a particular type of young man or woman who generally wears khaki shorts, carries a heavy burden in a large rucksack, and spends his or her holidays in a very peculiar fashion—that is, in walking or bicycling very rapidly and without purpose from place to place. These persons usually travel about in herds, and do not often venture far away from the main roads. They seem to have no object other than that of taking the maximum amount of exercise in the minimum amount of time. They suffer frequently from sore and blistered feet.

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Now a walker is not concerned with athletics, and though he is capable of walking twenty-five or thirty miles a day quite easily—because he looks after his boots—he does not often trouble to do more than fifteen. His walking is a digression; he likes to talk to people in the country inns, to look at old churches, to follow the courses of little streams, to watch birds, to search for rare flowers, and to climb the high hills. If he discovers a pleasant diversion, he pursues it, and he does not consider that he has wasted a day in doing so.

He carries always a minimum amount of kit. If he is putting up at inns, he takes no more than a change of clothes, a light raincoat, washing and shaving necessities, and perhaps a book: six to ten pounds altogether. If he proposes to camp each night, he makes shift with a light tent and sleeping bag, a ground-sheet, a primus, and a billycan; and his rucksack and its contents weigh no more than twenty or twenty-five pounds. A hiker, on the other hand, burdens himself with about forty pounds, and justifies this excess by pointing out that a soldier marches with more than a hundred.

Half of the art of walking is the art of travelling light. You can tell a novice by looking inside his kit-bag. The practised walker excludes from his kit everything which is not absolutely necessary; and he achieves a greater degree of comfort with little kit than the novice does with all his luxuries.

The walker chooses his company as carefully as he chooses his kit—and as selectively. Sometimes he feels that his own rucksack is the best company in the

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world. At others he travels with his best friend, but he knows that he is taking a risk in doing so, for walking—and particularly camping—is the sternest and most exacting test of friendship, and by walking in company most men have lost more friends than they have made. If a man can camp successfully with a woman, then he had better marry the girl and have done with it; for he has found the perfect wife.

But although you should walk alone or with one good friend, you may agreeably hike in the company of four or five or even a dozen; for hiking, being an affair of sweat and shoeleather, makes no intellectual demands upon companionship. After all, if you are going to spend your days in tearing breathlessly along a hard road, with blisters on your feet and an ache in your shoulders and forty pounds of kit on your back, you will not care very much what sort of fellows are tearing along beside you; and so you need choose them no more carefully than you would choose your company for a game of rounders.

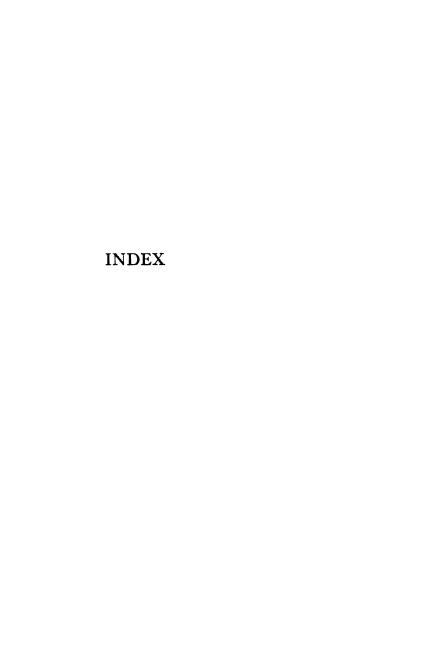
With regard to your route—if you are a hiker, it matters not. You may indulge in your peculiar form of athletics anywhere. You may sweat, you may skin the soles of your feet, you may tire yourself out, in almost any part of the world. But if you are a walker, you will get away from the main roads and take to the woods, the mountains and the moors. You will set your course, not by signposts, but by your map¹ and a compass, and at night by the stars. However, if your walking-tour is going to last for more than a week, you

¹The 1 inch ordnance map; not the half inch size, which is good enough for hikers, but not for you.

will wisely include one or two towns in your route, for there you will obtain hot baths and the luxuries of civilisation, and such diversion, innocent or otherwise, as suits your temperament and your mood. In this fashion you will make the best of both worlds.

Finally, you will not take your walking too seriously; for serious-mindedness is the sin of the hikers, which has made them what they are. You will not try to break records, and you will realise that walking is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. After all, there are so many exciting things to do, and there is so little time in which to do them. There are horses to ride, boats to sail, mountains to climb, games to play, countries to explore; there are books to read and plays to see, there is music to hear; there are all the absurd and lovely things men do with rods and rifles and guns; there is the sea with its ships, and the air with its winged ships; there is the friendship of men and women, and there is love. There is the whole of living, and it is well to remember that walkingtours are only a small part of living. Therefore do not be too serious; for it is better, I think, to dabble in many things than to break records in one.

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